

The Three Week
**Natural
Stress Relief**
Program



by Geoff D'Arcy Lic. Ac., D.O.M.
and Po D'Arcy

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"To compose our character is our duty, not to compose books, and win battles and provinces; but order and tranquility in our conduct. Our great glorious masterpiece is to live appropriately. All other things, to rule, to lay up treasure, to build are at most but little appendices and props."

—Michel Eyquem de Montaigne

Inner peace is not the absence of conflict nor the absence of challenge but rather the capacity to be with what is in each moment without prejudice or judgement.

—Christina Feldman

Forward

This program is based on our experience with ourselves patients and materials that have come across our path over many years. You can order the audio Tapes from our website www.darcynat.com or choose your own techniques, it is more effective with a good audio tape.

Take the Stress Questionnaire/ Evaluation that is posted on our web page. (www.darcynat.com) This Evaluation was developed from many years of experience and study of the major stress factors and gives you a 'Ground Zero' to start from to evaluate your progress over the next three weeks. This evaluation tool should give you an idea of how you measure on the stress scale. At the end of three weeks, you may wish to take the tests again and observe any changes that may have occurred.

Good luck,
Geoff and Po

Week I — Awareness

Please don't try to force awareness. Rather, smilingly coax it !

“When you gaze at an object, you bring blessing to it. For through contemplation, you know that it is absolutely nothing without the divinity that permeates it. By means of this awareness, you draw greater vitality to that object from the divine source of life.”

— Dov Baerot

Technique:

Tape I, Side A: Tightening and Releasing

Tape I, Side B: Music

What to Expect in Week I

How did you score on the stress and coping strategy evaluations? Are you “stressed out”? Regardless of whether you are experiencing stress in a major or a minor way, relaxation can be an invaluable tool. If you are under stress now, learning to relax can help you cope with what’s going on now and help you see clearly how to make changes for the future. If you are not under so much stress now, so much the better. Learning relaxation skills now can vastly improve your chances of coping with future stresses and lower your likelihood of going into “distress.”

The key theme of Week I is Awareness. You will focus on bringing the mind and body back together — “listening” to your body. Most of us walk around with our consciousness either in the past or future, performing one activity preoccupied with another. This habit of not being “present” can keep us out of touch with our body’s signals.

This Week’s Goal

During the first week we are working to become aware of what is, paying attention to the sensations of tension and release on the body without trying to change them. It has taken many years for tension to build up in the body. This first week is just a small step toward opening up your awareness in the body. (During the second week you will begin to work with very tight or tense areas.) If you come

across a very tight or tense area where it seems difficult to release, take note of these areas, and move on. Often just bringing your attention to an area will start to relax it. However, if this does not happen, do not worry or dwell on this body part. Keep moving, noting your ability to tense and release and move on.

Relaxation Tape One's purpose is to bring the mind through the body consciously and to seek to stay present with the body part being tensed and relaxed. Twenty minutes a day is recommended — twice a day is even better. Keep the mind moving through the body — don't get stuck. At first, you may find your mind drifting. With practice, however, you will only need to think of a body part and relaxation will take place. Tightening and releasing muscles methodically through the body will help you to become more aware of letting go of tension, and to become familiar with the sensation of release. As you proceed, you will be able to move into release of tension and relaxation more easily. Although we are recommending 20 minutes a day, the goal is to become aware in general so that you will be able to catch the tension in the body before it creates greater problems. Are you aware that your headaches start with tension in the shoulders and neck? Becoming more aware of unconscious habits or connections between situations in your life and tension is the first step towards changing those patterns before they wreak havoc on the body-mind.

Recommended Daily Exercises

1. Relaxation Tape One.

The tape can be used at any time during the day. Find a suitable time for you. It may be early in the morning; when you arrive home from work; or before bed. Experiment with different times. Then choose your favorite time and try to be consistent for a few days to develop a positive habit. Listen daily and be aware of how the tape makes you feel. Do you notice any changes? Make some personal notes for yourself. You may like to continue the relaxation by listening to Side B, Therapeutic Music, after working with Side A.

2. The Daily Awareness Activity.

Choose one activity that you do daily, i.e. taking a shower, eating breakfast, driving to work. While performing this activity, remain focused in the present. Take note of how your body is feeling. Be fully aware of your senses. For example, if you choose taking a shower as your activity, try to feel the water on your body.

How does the soap smell? What are you seeing? What are you tasting? While you are doing this, note when and where the mind drifts. Try to increase the time you are aware during this activity and be as conscious as you can for the duration. If you do nothing else, daily practice can help to keep you grounded and centered. You may find that it is relaxing in itself and that worries and stressful thoughts have disappeared without actively “working” on it.

3. Drawing and writing in your personal diary.

Take at least 10 minutes a day and write down your physical sensations. You can do this anytime during the day. It is a way to objectify what you are feeling and can help release tension. Try to be as aware as you can. Focus on your physical sensations. If you like to draw, this can be a very helpful way for you to “see” how your stress feels.

4. Major Daily Events Log.

The major daily events record highlights the major events that can trigger a stress response. This daily review can help you to record stress, alcohol and medication levels, levels of discomfort and feelings over the course of three weeks so that you can review your coping mechanisms.

Review your log for triggers; you may spot patterns.

The above exercises are designed to help you stay in the moment, “tune” the parasympathetic nervous system, and to begin to become aware of tension arising in the body before it takes over. You are beginning to learn to take control of your own circumstances and tune into your own body wisdom. With these exercises, you may find some pleasant surprises. You may also find some unpleasant surprises. Try not to judge what arises and to remain with whatever is happening objectively. You are beginning a new relationship to yourself. It is a time to be patient and non-judgmental.

Summary of Activities for Week I

1. Relaxation Tape One, at least 20 minutes per day.
2. Choose at least one awareness activity and practice it daily.

Week II – Relaxing and Moving Through

Inner peace is not the absence of conflict nor the absence of challenge but rather the capacity to be with what is in each moment without prejudice or judgement.

—Christina Feldman

Technique:

Tape II, Side A: Body Scan Relaxation

Tape II, Side B: Relaxing Into Sleep

What To Expect During Week II

Now that you have become aware of the tension in your body, what can you do about it? With increased self-awareness and selfevaluation we become conscious of when we start to go into a stress response. One person may discover that whenever the boss walks in the office she gets sweaty palms and her respiration becomes shorter. Another person may discover that two hours after the morning coffee break, he is feeling headachy and a little hungry. You may find that whenever you get to a certain body part, your mind begins to wander, and the next thing you know the tape is over.

In this week of the course, you'll expand your awareness to a new level, helping you to access your mind so that you can move energy easily through those tight and tense areas. Relaxation Tape II accompanies this chapter and takes you through the body again, this time spending time on areas that you noted during the first week as tight or tense. A minimum of 20 minutes a day is recommended. The mind and body are constantly communicating. If you are experiencing tension or tightness in one area of the body, this is an area that needs some attention. The relaxation process can help to bring attention to these areas in a safe, calm space without trying to force or change the sensation into something else. The key is relaxation and making room for the body to naturally relax into place. By scanning through your body with your mind, moving through tension, you are attempting bring the mind and body back together; you are getting the mind accustomed to "listening" to the body. You want to identify areas of secondary tension and strain that are present in times of stress. With awareness, you make conscious those

areas of tension and strain that are often shut down by the mind, deliberately not felt in the mind's attempt to keep pain and tension out. For example, not feeling tightness in the shoulder muscles until hours later; the obvious stressor may be gone, but the resulting headache remains. Generally we do not cultivate the mind's ability to interface with the body. Being unaware in our physical activity, with our thoughts wandering in the past or the future, we create a split between mind and body. Sweeping the body with awareness and relaxation helps us to integrate the mind and body to better elicit a relaxation response. This release improves bioenergetic flow and biochemical balance. Releasing the armoring of muscle spasms can be achieved with regular practice. One meditation teacher said "It is not so difficult to be out of the body as it is to be in it!" Sweeping through the body allows awareness to meet the tensions and relax them, not as an idea, but as a direct experience of reality. Side B of Tape II can be used for sleep. Many people suffer from sleep disruption when they are experiencing a great deal of stress. We noticed that many people participating in the programs at Wellbeing Medical Center were using the tapes to help them get to sleep. The technique on Side B is especially suited for that purpose. If stress disrupts your sleep, try Tape 2 "Relaxing Into Sleep."

Many of the stresses of our day are processed in our dream states at night, the R.E.M. or Rapid Eye Movement sleep stage. Usually this REM sleep progresses into a stage of very deep sleep where we get rejuvenated and renewed. However, if we get stuck in REM, i.e. too much dreaming, we awake tired.

Stress can disrupt sleep because it overstimulates the nervous system. When we are so "hyped" up, it takes longer for the parasympathetic nervous system to bring us back down and relax into sleep, especially if it isn't "tuned up." If you are experiencing difficulty falling asleep, try using this side of the tape this week. Even if you don't have trouble falling asleep, try this side of the tape before bed and experience yourself consciously relaxing into the sleep stage. This will continue to improve your skills of awareness and connection between your mind and body.

The Mind in Balance — A Goal for This Week

This week's goal is to begin cultivating a nonjudgemental mind; a worthy goal for a lifetime! You may have noticed now that sometimes you have a very easy time using the tapes, and at other times, your mind seems to wander as though you

don't get much benefit. Often a large part of the stress in our lives is the attitudes we place upon ourselves, pushing ourselves into unrealistic expectations. Often, we think we need to feel good all the time, or that we must always look our best, or be in peak performance condition. The truth is we are complex changing organisms responding to constantly changing circumstances. To expect to maintain the same level of performance is unrealistic and impossible. A better approach would be to allow and appreciate the wide range of experiences that you create during relaxation.

Every time you do the relaxation practice you will have a different experience. This does not mean that one is good or one is bad. At times, when you experience a very deep, relaxed, peaceful state, you might want to call this a "good" one. But this also creates aversion to those times when it doesn't feel so easy. One of the best lessons you can learn about relaxation is that it gets easier if you suspend judgment and stop trying so hard. As you practice, you may notice that your judgment plays a less significant role.

When we sweep through the body we find certain areas or muscle groups that we are unable to relax or even feel. In some areas we are overloaded with sensations. In other areas, we can barely feel anything. Sensation is there. Everywhere in the body some biochemical and bioelectromagnetic sensation is present; it is only our lack of awareness that may not be discerning enough to pick it up. As our awareness deepens and we open up numb or tense areas, we begin to re-balance bioenergetic flow and heal body-mind distress. Integrating and feeling the body with the awareness of the mind assists the body in restoring its natural energy flow. It has taken many years for tension and pain to build up in the body. This week is a first step on a long path to opening up awareness. It may be a long path, but remember, you end up in the direction you are headed!

Some Foods Are More Relaxing . . .

If you feel that you are under a great deal of stress, we recommend the counsel of a dietitian or nutritionist.

You may begin to discover some connections between certain stressful situations and your body symptoms. Are there any patterns to your behavior?

So many factors contribute to stress that it is difficult to name them all. However,

there are some simple common-sense dietary influences that can be looked at and changed.

Many foods contain sympathomimetic agents (chemical substances that mimic the sympathetic stress response.) The most common of these is caffeine, which belongs to the xanthine group of drugs. Xanthines overstimulate certain organs in the body trigger the release of stress hormones. Too much caffeine affects our ability to handle stress. Foods in the Xanthine family include: coffee, tea, cocoa, and chocolate. If some of these foods are in your diet, it would be wise to cut them out, or at least cut down and be aware of when you are using them in stressful situations. Ironically, these are often the foods we run to when stress is present. Being aware of Xanthine's properties may help you cut down and make a balanced diet one of your positive coping strategies.

High stress levels can also lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies — particularly Vitamin C and the B vitamins. Eating a balanced diet and taking a “stress vitamin” is good insurance against nutritional imbalance.

Daily Exercises for Week II

1. Relaxation Tape II, at least 20 minutes per day.
2. Continue to practice your daily activity exercise as in Week I and increase the duration of practice. For example, if you

Week 2 - Drawing Your Stress

How you relate to the issue is the issue.

Are you using new colors, shapes, varying your way of making marks on the paper? Observing how you feel as you draw is as important as the drawing itself. Pay attention to this simple exercise — you may have a lot to say to yourself!

Week III – Softening Around Tension

Technique: Tape III, Side A: Softening the mind around stress and tension.

Tape III, Side B: Music

Patience . . . allows us to approach each moment with true openness and respect. Whether we are facing pleasure or pain . . . our hearts will be peaceful if we can face it with patience. This isn't a quality of grim endurance, but rather one of softness and acceptance.

—*Inquiring Mind 1992 Calendar*

Much of what we call pain and tension is our resistance to unpleasant sensation.

What do you do when, no matter how hard

you try, you are unable to sweep through a tense or painful area, and find that the tension is intractable? During Week II, you worked at approaching those areas without judgment; perhaps you could not fully relax into those areas. Relaxation Tape III helps you to soften the mind around the tense areas, without the agitation of pushing them away. Reactions against the tension cause the mind to accentuate it. It is this agitated, aversive, and reactive frame-of-mind that you are now re-programming.

Our minds are conditioned to avoid unpleasant sensations and to crave the pleasant. Much of what we call pain and tension is our resistance to unpleasant sensation. Often, the experience of an unpleasant sensation is fear. The more we resist them, the more we feel like tension and resistance is all that we are! This can be very wearying. Fatigue arises out of the conflict of resistance. Instead of closing down, you can dissolve the conditioning that magnifies the strain and pain of stress by “softening” around the tension. Rather than treating yourself harshly (in the name of discipline), know that you can trust yourself and your intentions and thereby, be compassionate.

Who's got time to relax? A Goal for This Week

"A smooth sea never made a skillful sailor."

— *Salada Tea Bag*

Most of us accept stress as a way of life. But by denying ourselves permission to acknowledge our stress, we shut down the energy flow to that area in the body-mind, leaving it isolated and retarding the healing process. The more we view spasm and tension as the enemy, the more we try to push it away. Changing this perspective keeps us from reinforcing tension from the mind into the body.

The goal of this entire program is to create a new, healthier behavior by deliberately re-patterning a reactive body-mind. We want you to achieve this goal as a habit, something which precedes any thoughts. By re-training ourselves to soften around tension, we release the tense fist of resistance. The investigation into the resistance of tension and pain is also an investigation into resistance to life. When resistance begins to fade, stress (energy) becomes workable. Softening with loving-kindness and acceptance dissolves fear allows us to be pre-sent with the actual sensation and situation. Taking 20 minutes a day to relax will work wonders to regain a daily balance. Relaxation Tape III is particularly suited to this purpose. This tape takes Week II's Relaxation techniques one step further. Its objective is to help you work with those tense and tight painful areas that you haven't been able to "move through." The tape can be used for any area of feeling or discomfort, physical, mental or emotional. The tape helps you to calm your mind when it comes in contact with a difficult area, encouraging you to "soften" around it. Practice of this technique breaks the cycle of the reactive mind that pushes away unpleasant sensation, and whittles away at any negative conditioning related to tension or discomfort. By allowing stormy, unpleasant sensations to remain in the presence of a calm, balanced mind, the energy can release. The body's natural healing balance can take place. We can use these unpleasant storms and sensations as a way to gain wisdom and compassion.

Daily practice with the tapes will consistently help you build a skill level of concentration that can bring you back to the present moment in times of stress. When the bodymind suffers from prolonged or acute stress, focus is lost. A scattered mind accomplishes little, tasks take longer, and the apparent stress of a situation seems to increase. A focused, centered mind can resolve conflicts with greater

ease and efficiency, bringing a quicker resolution and recovery to a stressful situation.

Summary of Activities for Week 3

1. Relaxation Tape III.

Twenty minutes daily, as used in Week I and Week II. You may use Side 3B, TheraSound™ Music, to relax after working with Side 3A.

2. Choose at least one awareness activity and practice it daily.

3. Draw your stress, to help evaluate and increase awareness in a “non-intellectual perspective.”

4. Daily entry into major daily events log.

5. Set Week 3 goals and check off when accomplished.

6. Keep a diary or Log with your comments.

Self-evaluation

Re-evaluate yourself at the end of the program. Have you noticed any changes in your response to stress? Have you made any

