

Relaxing the Reactive Response–



People who are experiencing infertility are often told to "Just relax and you'll get pregnant". While this is not a very thoughtful or well-received comment for most women (or couples), there is some truth to the fact that reducing stress or finding a more "relaxed" way to do life may be helpful in the quest for fertility. Central to mind/body work, whether about infertility or other problems, is the elicitation of the "Relaxation Response," a phrase coined by Harvard cardiologist Dr. Herbert Benson in 1975.

The Relaxation Response is defined as a physiological change in the body elicited by such techniques as yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, guided imagery, centering prayer, visualization, repetition of a word or phrase, or even repetitive exercise. The Relaxation Response is the exact opposite of the "fight or flight" or stress response. Daily practice of the Relaxation Response decreases depression, decreases anxiety and anger, improves mood states, and improves the functioning of the immune system – all Very Good Things in managing the stress and roller-coaster ride of infertility. A major component of the Mind/Body Wellness Program for Fertility is the regular elicitation and practice of the Relaxation Response.

Here are Relaxation Response Instructions Made Simple (but not easy):

- Set aside 10-20 minutes for your practice (everything else will keep).
- Turn off beepers, cell phones, other communication devices (and don't answer the door).
- If it is helpful, play quiet classical or meditative music in the background.
- Find a comfortable space in a chair or sofa in a quiet room – or sit on the floor with back support. (Please don't lie down unless you intend to sleep.)
- If you wish, light a candle or incense to set the mood.
- Close your eyes if you are okay doing so; if not, simply gaze down at the floor.
- Bring your focus to your breathing, taking smooth inhalations and exhalations through the nose (don't hold your breath at any time and save the mouth breathing for aerobic exercise).
- Exaggerate a sigh and allow any tension in the jaws, neck, shoulders or lower back to decrease with each exhalation.
- Notice any intruding thoughts and simply let them go as you return the focus to your breathing. (Don't beat yourself up if your monkey mind wanders – it probably will when you first start.)
- If it is helpful, choose a short word, prayer or phrase to repeat over and over to keep your focus.
- After 10-20 minutes, take several deep inhalations and exhalations, raise your arms over your head to stretch, open your eyes, and reorient yourself to the room.

IF NONE OF THIS WORKS, GO TO A YOGA OR PILATES CLASS, WALK IN A BEAUTIFUL PARK OR WOODS, OR FIND A CHAPEL/CHURCH/SYNAGOGUE TO SIT IN FOR A QUIET, MEDITATIVE BREAK.