

Hamac Column - The (forgotten) art of relaxation

To escape the frenzy of daily life, it is essential to take time for yourself and relax. To do so, there are several relaxation techniques whose common purpose is to help with deep healing.

Yoga

Yoga can be practised by anybody, regardless of ability. The goal is to find harmony between the body and mind, to provide fast, sustainable benefits such as reduced stress, increased energy, improved concentration and greater breathing capacity. In addition, yoga improves digestion and sleep quality. It helps athletes by improving cardiovascular health and muscle strength. For women, the best time to start yoga is during pregnancy, because the breathing techniques and stretches are beneficial for the mother to be and prepare her for delivery. After the baby is born, practising yoga can reduce stress and increase energy levels.

Mindfulness meditation

This practice involves increased focus on a part of the body, a movement or any other stimulus with the goal of returning to the present each time the mind wanders. This technique can be done formally, i.e. by sitting down and taking the time to practise, or informally, no matter what time of day (while doing housework, for example). The objective of this type of meditation is to be aware of the present, whether positive or negative, without judgement.

Tai Chi and Qi Gong

Both of these branches of traditional Chinese medicine combine slow movements performed in harmony with breathing.

Tai Chi aims to improve flexibility, strengthen the musculoskeletal system and maintain good physical and mental health. The meditative aspect and the precision of the movements help improve concentration and memory.

Qi Gong combines slow movements, breathing exercises and self-awareness. *Qi* refers to "vital energy" and *gong* means "mastery of an art acquired through regular practice and discipline".

Meditation

The purpose of meditation, which should be practised regularly, is to focus your attention on a sound, object, mental image or your own breathing. It can be practised standing, sitting or moving with eyes open or closed. Concentration helps let the flow of thoughts escape.

Progressive muscle relaxation

This technique involves contracting a limb and keeping it contracted for approximately five seconds, fully feeling the tension, then releasing while being aware of this release.

Visualization and mental imagery

These techniques call on the resources of the mind, imagination and intuition to improve wellness.

Visualization is the mental ability to imagine an object, situation, emotion or sensation until the same physiological effects are reproduced in reality.

As for mental imagery, it raises images in the same way as in a dream. Most of the time, a counsellor guides the process. The counsellor could then suggest that you relate your experience in writing so that the technique becomes even more beneficial. Mental imagery is used to stimulate creativity, discover certain facets about yourself or the causes of an illness and the methods to cure it.

To apply these practices and discover more relaxation tools, feel free to contact your Health *InSight* program!

Note: To make the text easier to read, the masculine form is also used to designate the feminine.