

Dr. Roxanne's Rescue Remedies for Stress Relief

By Roxanne Daleo

"There is a doctor inside each patient. (Let us) give the doctor who resides inside a chance to go to work."

Albert Schweitzer, MD, Nobel Prize Winner

A powerful form of mind/body medicine is now helping people of any age, including young people like you, to cope with both physical illness and the everyday stresses in life. Known as "guided imagery," it involves using relaxation exercises, positive mental images and special breathing techniques.

Suppose you are faced with a situation that is unpredictable or out of your control, then learning guided imagery will give you tools you can pull out of your "medicine bag" whenever you need them. These mind/body healing techniques can help you relax your body so you can recharge yourself. This process decreases muscle tension and the stress that contributes to physical and emotional discomfort.

There are 3 steps in the process of stress relief. They are: to identify your stress symptoms, to reframe stressful situations, and to practice relaxation techniques. Each step is part of a progression to increase self-awareness and to experience relief.

When practiced regularly, **powerful benefits** of these techniques include:

- Easy to use
- You can self-start
- Reduces physical and mental stress
- Decreases fear and anger
- Expands creativity
- Strengthens a sense of control
- Increases concentration
- Improves skills in problem-solving
- Increases attention and recall
- Enhances self-esteem

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1. IDENTIFY YOUR STRESS SYMPTOMS

Using the mind/body messages of discomfort and strain as a warning sign, we learn to understand our body's responses under normal and stressful conditions. When we understand ourselves well, we have more control and relieve tension.

It is useful to see if your stress symptoms are predominately physical, emotional or behavioral. This helps you develop more awareness and appreciate how the body signals you to bring your awareness to the pain -- that part of you that is asking for attention. Once we identify the warning of overload, we can stop ignoring the harmful effects of stress and start shifting into deep relaxation.

Take a moment to make a checklist of your stress symptoms.

PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL
Headaches	Nervous, Anxious	Grinding teeth at night
Stomach aches	Angry	Forgetful
Tight neck / shoulders	Can't stop worrying	Bossiness
Trouble Sleeping	Can't laugh	Critical of Others
Lower Back Pain	Lonely	Over eating

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2. REFRAME STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

See your problems in a new way. Pay attention to your thinking. Learn methods of detachment to conserve energy and program yourself for well-being and inner peace.

Our sense of time is a major influencing factor in our awareness of pain and also anxiety. It promotes a sense of urgency and unneeded stress. When we become familiar with conscious relaxation techniques, we develop a new sense of time - one that promotes "I have all the time there is". We experience the moment as long and full - the ever present now. With practice, our sense of time expands. More importantly, we cultivate an attitude of friendliness with time.

Remember: a feeling begins with a thought and a thought can be changed. Feelings of appreciation and love help our bodies stay healthy and strong, while feelings of meanness, anger, and sadness wear the body out.

A picture held in the mind can literally effect every cell in our bodies. The brain makes no distinction between real or imagined information. So when we worry about things going wrong and picture all the possible fearful events, our bodies go into a stress response which increases our blood pressure, heart rate, respiration and overall metabolic rate. In short, our body starts using up energy, like a car engine revving-up to super high gear. Prolonged, without relief, this over-excited, over-stressed condition wears out your physical body and contributes to emotional distress as well. As soon as you realize you are stressed-out, your body is asking you to pay attention to your own particular warning signs of discomfort and pain. Then it is your opportunity to stop, slow down and regroup. Use guided imagery CD's to imagine health, peace, love and joyful beautiful images, then your body will respond positively.

Here is a reframe statement:

"Wisdom is the instantaneous recognition that a crisis is a blessing and even greater wisdom recognizes that blessings can also trigger a crisis." (W. Dyer)

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3. PRACTICE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Your imagination is a very powerful tool! Current brain research tells us that we typically use only 10% of our brain's potential. Guided imagery offers a way to tap into that other 90% of the brain. Also, guided imagery is a way to give your mind something positive to focus on, using music and positive suggestions. Unless you give your mind something to focus on, your mind will decide what it wants to focus on - and it may choose something like pain or sadness.

How do you learn guided imagery? You can be taught by a health professional (such as a psychologist, nurse, or teacher) or you can listen to audio and video programs designed for this purpose.

To make guided imagery work for you, follow these guidelines:

- Practice regularly
- Use a quiet space. Turn off the TV, computer or radio
- Find a comfortable position. Sitting up like royalty on throne chair is best.
- Listen to the audio recording.
- Let your imagination open to creativity; after each audio program you can draw or paint a picture, write a poem or a story, or dance.

Try a two-minute countdown if you need something quick for on the spot relief. Visualize an image of a beautiful stairway, one that leads to a garden, up a mountain pass or onto a boardwalk to the ocean. Count one step at a time, one breath at a time. Count from one to ten as you imagine yourself walking somewhere in nature that is pleasant and peaceful to you. Now count back from ten to one, one breath at a time, one step at a time.

Relax your eyes. It might be amazing to know, but for most people, just closing the eyes can bring about a relaxation response. So much of our day, we are over-stimulated by visual information. Learn how to take a deep, calming breath, let your eyes close, and your blood pressure lowers, automatically.

A smile is a gift of love that brings cheer to ourselves and others. Research shows the physiological changes in neurochemistry when we produce a smile. Notice what happens. Your beautiful face seems to brighten up. Now give the smile away. You will notice a good feeling as you notice them smile back at you.

You can use these rescue remedies wherever you are, and you'll find they work naturally and easily each time you use them.

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About Dr. Roxanne Daleo

Dr. Roxanne is a health educator and therapist who taught at Harvard University Health Services. Trained in relaxation and stress reduction techniques at the Harvard Medical School, Division of Behavioral Medicine, her work is based on extensive experience with children and adults. Dr. Daleo also studied the use of symbols for healing from C.G. Jung Institute of Zurich, Switzerland.

Dr. Daleo founded MindWorks for Children to produce audio-visual guided imagery relaxation programs for children and families.

For the past 15 years, she has worked as clinician, instructor and consultant in a wide variety of health care settings. Her work is dedicated to helping children help themselves with stress-related disorders, such as anxiety, fear, depression, pain, sleep disturbances and behavioral disorders.

Highlights from **Dr. Roxanne's Rescue Remedies for Stress Relief:**

Find Relief - How to Reframe a Stressful Situation

Stress Relief and Learning to Relax and Revitalize

Reading the Body's Signals

Understanding Pain as a Warning Sign

Guided Imagery Relaxation: A Powerful Form of Mind/Body Medicine