

# Relaxation to Meditation

## THERE'S SOMETHING IN IT FOR EVERYONE!

By Colleen Blanchfield, MD

**W**hen I was first presented with the idea of taking 20 minutes out of my hectic day to “breathe deeply and clear my mind” my first thought was “What planet are you from?” The last thing that I needed was someone telling me to calm down and take it easy—for 20 minutes and then I would feel better. Well, that is exactly what I do every day...and it works.

My first experience with relaxation/meditation was in a course offered through the Mind/Body Institute at Harvard University. It is under the guidance of Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiologist who began to explore the relaxation response back in the late 1970s for blood pressure control. He has also researched the physiological changes that occur with relaxation/meditation and has offered courses on the subject.

What's in it for you? An opportunity to take a break from your hectic work load without leaving the office, getting all sweaty or depending on a massage therapist for relief. It is a way to reverse the stress barometer and recharge yourself without a cup of coffee. It is inexpensive and has no side effects. Besides that — it works.

The difference between the relaxation response and meditation is the depth of relaxation, the

ability to prevent thoughts and keep one's mind blank for the purpose of gaining access to the higher self. The relaxation response can be done in 10 or 20 minutes. Meditation involves deeply relaxing the body, keeping the mind free of thoughts and maintaining this state for 45 minutes or longer. It is not the time element that is of

importance but rather the state of relaxation and ability to think of nothing. It seems one needs a blank mind in order to access the “higher self”. I suggest one begin with a simple relaxation technique.

First one must find the time. This is the most challenging part. Pick a time that you can stick with and a time that is available every day. You won't do the exercise every day to start but to have the time available is important. Turn your beeper to vibrate mode and put it in the next room. Turn your cell phone off. If you are at home or in your office tell everyone you are unavailable for the next 30 minutes. This will be as much of a training process for them as for you. It took me months before my son understood what unavailable meant. Do not get discouraged - you **can**

find the time.

The second step is to get a welcoming spot where you can sit comfortably and not be encour-

## Your Thoughts

**We asked women physicians to share their passions outside of medicine and ways of relieving stress. Here are a few of the responses we received:**

*My passion outside of medicine is my horses. My husband and I have a farm on which we raise horses and even some cows. We have 18 horses and have bred 10 of them. We try to find them jobs and make them useful citizens to society and hence, many of mine are eventers and foxhunters. Although my practice leaves me little time to enjoy them, I try to ride in the evenings and on weekends. I compete in the discipline known as Eventing which consists of dressage, show jumping and cross country. My horses and farm are clearly my stress relievers and I am just fortunate to live in a little slice of heaven where I can return daily from the demands of medicine.*

- Dr. Ann Ma

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aged to fall asleep. The less clutter the better. Identify this as your “time out” spot. Let people know that when you are here you are NOT to be interrupted. This might sound like a lot but getting this in place is half the battle.

Begin by sitting comfortably with your hands over your lower abdomen. Notice your breathing. Focus on inhaling and depressing your diaphragm so that your hands push outward from your abdomen. This is called “belly breathing”. Get into a rhythm. Once you have accomplished this begin to clear your mind. Let go of your worries, your thoughts, your fears...everything. Focus on inhaling and exhaling.

If you need some help with this when you exhale repeat a single word or group of words such as “One” or “Let it go”. In meditation this is

called a mantra. Do this for 10 minutes to start and work up to 20 minutes over a five-day period. Notice your stress level when you start and when you finish. Amazed? You got it. Not feeling much? Then you need to get out your calendar and mark a day off on September 23, 2005. That is the date for our MSW Women’s Section Conference “Gaining Control of Your Life: Well-Balanced Physicians Provide Better Patient Care.” We have some fabulous speakers and “experts” to help us obtain that relaxed state of being. Until then — practice.

For more information, consult the following web links:

- [www.ivillage.com](http://www.ivillage.com)
- [www.healing.about.com](http://www.healing.about.com)
- [www.learningmeditation.com](http://www.learningmeditation.com)

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*I relieve stress by making sure that I resolve all work issues in my mind before I step into my home. Boundaries must be drawn between the two. I use my commute to and from work as time to reflect and simple outdoor physical activity like bike riding or walking (the former preferable). No matter how bad you think life is I am grateful for good health, a roof over my head and food on my table. So many people in the world don’t even have that.*

*Always find the time to read; books are sources of mental stimulation that are not demanding or threatening and provide simple entertainment on your own schedule*

— Dr. Maria R. Cundiff

*I play the violin in a quartet, play tennis, and have learned to say “no!” I am physically active and LOVE being outdoors (a great stress releaser). I get no pleasure from pampering but I do enjoy an occasional massage. I also stopped caring how messy my kids rooms are but care about conduct, attitude to school, activities and others. I am an owner of my practice. I decided to do well what is my responsibility and let my partner do his job and stop worrying about other people’s issues, unless they ask for my help.*

— Dr. Mary Schmidt

*After 22 years of practicing the profession that was all I ever wanted to do, I think the most difficult time was when I realized that I needed “rejuvenation” and non-medical passions.*

*Certainly my husband, children, and family have been and are still my “passions”, but not always rejuvenating!*

*Number one: faith and prayer.*

*Number two: outdoor activity, especially with my beloved horses(sometimes my best friends!).*

*Number three: friends, medical and non-medical. With friends, I had to learn that I cannot survive by always being ‘on the job’ nurturing others, and choose friends accordingly. Needy folks are attracted to nurturers.*

— Dr. Joan Devine

*To relieve stress from medicine and family, I’ve always exercised. In the past, aerobics, modern dance, jazz dance and now what I do is pilates, yoga and running. My passions outside of work are attending performing arts (opera, symphony, ballet) and reading good fiction books at the beach.*

— Dr. Sue K. Sayegh

*Gardening and tennis are my favorite escapes. My gardening style allows me to be creative and free of worries. I might go outside for five minutes to check the garden and return two hours later after becoming totally immersed in moving plants, pruning and weeding and pleasantly covered in dirt. It doesn’t seem like work because my mind can wander aimlessly while I enjoy the fresh air. I also play on a tennis team which enables me to stay healthy.*

— Dr. Brenda Dintiman

### **Dr. Cane honored by YWCA of Richmond**

Dr. Dianne Reynolds-Cane was among 10 women who have been selected as the 2005 Outstanding Women by the YWCA of Richmond. She was honored for her work in the areas of Health and Science.

Since 1980, the YWCA has been honoring outstanding women with the Outstanding Women Awards in 10 categories.

This year's winners were selected from more than 60 nominees, based on their impact on the community, their leadership skills, a high level of personal and professional achievement, and commitment to equality and racial harmony.

The honorees were formally recognized at the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Outstanding Women Awards Luncheon held Friday, April 22, 2005 at the Greater Richmond Convention Center.

Dr. Reynolds-Cane currently serves as Medical Director of the Daily Planet Health Care for the Homeless Clinic, a federal community health center in downtown Richmond. She oversees improvements in quality of care as well as a near doubling in patients served, since 2003, in the Planet's four clinical areas; eye, dental, mental health, and primary medical.

She is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health at Virginia Commonwealth University.

### **VCU physicians join prestigious publication**

Two Virginia Commonwealth University physicians have been named editor-in-chief and deputy editor of the Journal of Women's Health, a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal that publishes clinical papers on health

issues that affect women across the lifespan.

Susan G. Kornstein, M.D., professor of psychiatry and obstetrics and gynecology, will serve as editor-in-chief; and Wendy S. Klein, M.D., professor of internal medicine and obstetrics and gynecology, will serve as deputy editor.

Kornstein is co-founder and executive director of the VCU Institute for Women's Health, designated a National Center of Excellence in Women's Health by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She is also director of clinical research for VCU's Department of Psychiatry and executive director of the VCU Mood Disorders Institute.

Klein, co-founder and senior deputy director of the Institute for Women's Health, is also program director of the Women's Health Residency track in Internal Medicine. She has consistently been recognized in *Richmond Magazine's* listing of the "Best Doctors in Richmond," and since 1996 has been included in *The Best Doctors in America*.

Kornstein is co-editor of *Women's Mental Health: A Comprehensive Textbook*, which is the first comprehensive textbook on women's mental health.

Klein is the founding past president of the VCU Women in Medicine, Science & Dentistry organization (WISDM) and founder of the annual Pathways to Leadership Conference for women physicians and scientists. She is chairwoman of the School of Medicine Committee on the Status of Women & Minorities.

The Journal of Women's Health focuses on the diseases and conditions that hold greater risk for or are more prevalent among women and provides research and therapeutic options for the management of these diseases. Features include original papers and review articles, editorial commentary, news from Women's Health Networks and observations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

*Please send your Accolades to [aridolphi@msw.org](mailto:aridolphi@msw.org) so we can share your accomplishments with our readers. For more information, contact Amy Ridolphi, 800-746-6768, ext. 1025.*

## Sign up now for the MSV's 2005 Women Physicians' Conference!

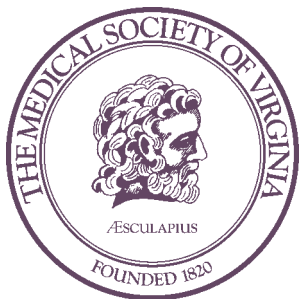
**GAINING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE:  
WELL-BALANCED PHYSICIANS PROVIDE  
BETTER PATIENT CARE**

**Friday, September 23, 2005  
The Sheraton West  
Richmond, Virginia**



This year's program is aimed at "healing the healer." You will learn how to reconnect with yourself and also discover some creative ways to prevent burnout. The conference will include the following sessions: "Mindfulness and Physician Well Being," "Flexible Scheduling," and "Reconnecting With Yourself." The conference also gives participants the opportunity to meet with fellow women physicians. For more information, contact the MSV Membership Department, (800) 746-6768, ext. 1050.

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