



The Relaxation Response: A Key Motivator of Self-Healing

As an owner of a Healing Touch practice, I am constantly revamping as my responsibilities get more complicated. I can now look forward to HIPPA guideline adherence if I join with other licensed integrative practitioners who accept insurance and I can anticipate a NPI (National Provider Identifier) number in my future. . . which means that I, other HTCPs and healthcare facilities can bill for Healing Touch services. Hmm. . . billing. . . another complication, true, but another profit center as well.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) is revamping too. Recently, NIH broadened its scope of research in a surprising way that actually supports Healing Touch. Did you know that the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), a unit within the US Department of Defense (DOD), is exploring ways to treat our military's physical and emotional traumas with light, electricity, sound and magnets? My Hara line vibrated when I read that! Our own DOD currently views the human nervous system as an electrical delivery conduit. To that end, DARPA awarded grants to map and treat the onset of disease by stimulating peripheral nerves "to modulate functions in the brain, spinal cord and internal organs."¹

Hey DOD! Energy Medicine practitioners assist with that,

too! We center, ground, attune, send intentions and then, through our biofield, Cosmic Energy modulates functions in the brain, spinal cord and internal organs of our clients. No other electrical equipment required.

When I first began my study of Healing Touch, I had heard of Herbert Benson, the researcher at Harvard Medical School who originally coined the term Relaxation Response in his seminal 1974 Psychiatry article.² By the early 1980s, Benson knew, as did our founder Janet Mentgen, that mind-body relaxation was critical for client recovery and self-healing. For Benson, it was about reversing the effects of stress on the body and determining how parasympathetic nervous system activity could be induced; for Mentgen, it was about restoring harmony and balance to the energy system supporting the client's self-healing. Benson was beginning to language scientifically what Mentgen recognized intuitively in her practice.

Today, as I conduct an intake with my clients, I often field questions about the evidence basis for Healing Touch. They seem to appreciate knowing that our full-body techniques function to elicit a scientifically recognized Relaxation Response. I tell them that they may experience (1) lowered heart and breathing rates; (2) slowed mental chatter; (3) a sense of emotional distance; (4) heightened attention to their interior experience; and (5) an expanding self-awareness and a sense of peace.

In the language of science, that would be (1) decreased metabolism, blood pressure, heart and respiration rates; (2) induced alpha/theta brain wave activity; (3) suppressed amygdala reactivity; (4) increased pre-frontal cortex decision-making functions; and (5) a pervasive present-moment awareness of self in relationship.

In my practice, pain, inflammation, anxiety/tension/stress and mental fatigue seem to describe some aspect of every client's symptoms. Over time, I have come to the understanding that physiologically at least, inducing a Relaxation Response during a session is akin to turning my clients into Jedi Knights who can wield the Force of Breath to defend themselves against infectious organisms (The Hated Sith) and other invaders working with the disease (The Empire), plotting to reduce health and well-being.

Another thing, DOD! Energy Medicine practitioners have been assisting bio-psycho-social health (we call it clearing, opening and connecting the biofield) of our military through Stand Down programs. We know how beneficial



eliciting a Relaxation Response can be for veterans, especially those with PTSD.³ While I am centering/grounding/attuning, I always ask my clients to take deep, rhythmic, breaths. Breathing deeply, down into the lungs, also helps them stimulate their vagus nerve into activity which then leads to released endorphins, muscle relaxation, increasing circulation and elevated oxygen levels; all the physiological dynamics our immune systems needs to keep our bodies healthy.

I freely admit that life as a business owner of a Healing Touch practice gets me stressed sometimes. . . so many hats to wear. And my mind-body interprets this stress as a threat and releases those pesky hormones (adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine) that end up making me anxious and fat. But you and I could not be luckier because when we do the work of healing, we actually vitalize our entire biofield! Not just the physiological aspects (take that DOD).

One last comment. . . there is another Relaxation Response benefit that Benson revealed in 2008 that is really BIG.^{4,5} We can alter our own genetic activity. Yes, we can significantly improve our own health and disease profiles by activating the body's Relaxation Response regularly, which in turn changes how our genes express.

Isn't that fantastic? What a motivator, right?

So, keep up with your meditation, mantra, prayer, breath focus, meditative yoga methods, tai chi and more, because all healing becomes self-healing. €



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