

## ***Relax and De-Stress!***

By

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National Relaxation Day was August 15<sup>th</sup>. With the beginning of school and all of the extracurricular activities of families, the importance of relaxation has moved to the forefront of everyone's thinking. In fact, research shows the average woman over the age of 18 spends most of her time driving and taking care of the children, which means women leave little time for themselves to relax. For single parents, this applies to both women and men who have primary custody of their children and are responsible for dropping the children off at school or extracurricular activities, or heading to volunteer and social engagements. Americans seem to be on the go constantly.

In this month's column, I will share with you some suggestions from Dr. Erin Olivo, a renowned stress expert, to spread awareness about the importance of setting aside "me-time" to give the body and mind a chance to unwind. Whether at work, home or on the road, Dr. Olivo encourages people to find time in their busy schedules to take mini-breaks throughout the day to relax and maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

According to Dr. Olivo, "Today's busy schedules leave most of us with little time to think about ourselves and I don't think people realize the health problems chronic stress can cause on the body. By taking mini-breaks throughout the day and practicing relaxation techniques, you can improve how you physically respond to stress by lowering blood pressure and heart rate, reducing muscle tension and strengthening your immune system."

Following are some simple relaxation techniques you might want to try:

- Push all the right pressure points by giving hand reflexology a try and massage the inside of your right palm with your left thumb in a circular motion. Repeat this same technique on the other hand. In addition, find the sensitive spot in between your thumb and index finger. Press deeply, hold for 10 seconds and release.
- Reduce tension by creating a soothing environment with music, lighting, and aromas. Create a playlist with fun tunes mom, dad and the children can enjoy on the next car ride or at home. Consider a lavender scented car air freshener or aromatherapy room spray which offers a therapeutic, soothing effect. Promote a relaxing setting by dimming the lights.

- Consider *à la car* dining if your family is always on the go and has little time for dinner. Pack a well-balanced dinner for the car so children can eat a healthy meal in between after-school activities. Consider packing snacks and water for the next car trip or to stow away at the office.
- Laugh until the heart is content because laughing releases endorphins and other healthy hormones, as well as lowers blood pressure and increases oxygen in the blood. For a good laugh, watch snippets from a funny movie, reminisce about a recent event that put a smile on your face or pop in a stand-up comedy on tape or CD on your next road trip.
- Leave a few minutes to spare by remembering to build an extra 15 minutes into your schedule to prevent the unnecessary stress of running late.

By practicing the above simple relaxation techniques daily, a person's overall health and quality of life can be improved, including reduced back pain and headaches, improved mood and concentration, and increased energy. For those of us who seem to run round-the-clock schedules, hopefully some of these ideas will fit into your busy lifestyle and help lower your stress levels. Give them a try! (Source: <http://www.ijbnpa.org/content/1/1/4>).