**Relax! It could save your life and help you succeed**

First of all, let’s look at your checklist for the day. Getting to places on time, improving your study or work performance, making sure the family is well provided for, and that there’s enough money in the bank, etc. Are you anxious to achieve your goals of success and financial gain? Do you feel pressure when you think about work, money, family or finances? How about relaxation? Have you left any time for relaxation?

It’s hard to believe, but if you want to succeed in your life, relaxation is just as important as hard work. Not only that, relaxation is a major factor in your health, as well as an important influence on your intimate relationship and family life. This is because when you are not relaxed, your body is under stress, which causes hormones to be constantly put into your blood stream, affecting your brain, nervous system, digestion, breathing and heart rate. When under stress your body and mind can become disconnected from people and your environment.

It’s not enough to take vacations once a year; you need small vacations every day in order to give your body a chance to enjoy a sense of chemical, mental and emotional balance. Many people think relaxation is a luxury they are too busy to enjoy, but in fact relaxation is an absolute necessity if you want to enjoy a productive and prosperous life.

At first it might be hard to learn how to relax, because your body has developed the habit of remaining in a stressful state. Even your mind will convince you that you shouldn’t stop and that you don’t have the time to relax. You have to keep going, going, going! Worries about money, work performance, your children or other possible objects of concern, can make you feel very tense and inaccessible to others, and this tension may be hard to loosen up. Let’s look at three aspects of your physical being that can prevent you from truly relaxing:

• Shallow Breathing: If you look at the way babies breathe you will notice that their breaths extend into their bellies. People who are under stress usually breathe only to their solar plexus, and many people’s breaths are even shallower than that. Learning to breathe fully is an essential aspect to your daily “mini vacations”.  This is where meditation and relaxation techniques have proven to be extremely helpful.

• Muscle tightness: Many of us are so used to holding tension in our muscles and joints that we go through our entire day without noticing how tight our jaws, shoulders, chest and stomach muscles are. Therefore we need to practice dropping our shoulders loosening our jaws and consciously relaxing our chest, stomach and other areas where we tend to hold on too tightly. Exercise and relaxation techniques combine to be effective stress releasers for the physical body.

• The anxious mind: It’s been estimated that the average human being has 50,000 thoughts per day, many of which actually maintain the pressure we put on ourselves. An anxious mind is constantly living in the future and worrying about what could happen. Most of the time it worries about things that never come about. Consciously directing our thoughts towards peace and tranquility and bringing the attention back to what’s happening now will relieve stress almost instantly.

Ayoka will provide you with the tools and resources, which we invite you to use in your own way and at your own pace. We will not tell you what you should do, or how you should live. All the information and suggestions we provide are here to assist you to bring back equilibrium in life. There’s no need to perform or push yourself and you are in charge of your progress.

We hope that you will consider taking the “mini vacations” throughout your day. Relax and breathe and just simply notice any tension you may feel in your body. Very little effort is required…. most relaxation takes place by simply noticing.

Mini Vacations: These simple exercises can be done anywhere. Choose any number of these exercises depending on how much time you have and which ones you feel like doing. Although it’s easier to concentrate in a quiet place, you can do these exercises even in a noisy restaurant, on a crowded bus or train.

1. Clench your right fist tightly, as tight as you can and hold it for ten seconds. Notice other areas of your body that become tense or tight as you clench tightly. Then relax your hand and enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation in your hand and those other tensed up areas. Then clench your left hand tightly, as tight as you can. Hold it for ten seconds and notice other areas of your body that become tense or tight as you clench tightly. Then relax your hand and enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation in your hand and those other tensed up areas.
2. Sit comfortably and scan your body for any tightness or tension. Pay special attention to your jaw, shoulders, stomach and buttocks. When you find a tight spot, count slowly backwards from ten. With each number watch the tightness melt into a relaxed state.
3. Take a moment to notice your breathing, but don’t change it. First just notice how deeply your breath is going into your body. Then invite a gentle breath through your nose and down into your belly. Notice your belly slowly expand, and then watch it contract as you exhale. Count as you inhale softly all the way into your belly, and exhale to the same count. You can do this exercise for ten seconds or ten minutes. Your complete concentration is more important than the time you invest in these exercises.
4. (This one might be better to do privately). Sitting comfortably, let your jaw drop open as far as it can go. Don’t force it open — simply let it drop gently open as far as it wants to go. As you do this, notice your shoulders also want to drop into a more relaxed position. You can even let them drop down by your side. Notice that your breathing naturally becomes deeper and flows into your belly. If it’s possible, you can even make a sighing sound as you relax.
5. Although this exercise is more suitable for lying on the floor or in bed, it can be effective while sitting. This is a gravity exercise. While in whatever position you choose, imagine that you could feel the force of gravity pulling you toward the center of the earth, causing you to feel heavier and heavier, your body sinking deeper into the chair or bed. Let your body feel pulled down by the gravitational force, and as this happens, imagine the gravity pulling all the stress and tightness out of your body into the earth. Count slowly backwards from ten down to zero, and with each number you feel the gravity more strongly, your body becoming heavier and the stress flowing out more and more. You can end this exercise by counting forward from one to ten, noticing your body feeling lighter with every count. Take at least a minute for this exercise if you can, but even twenty seconds would benefit you if you give it your full attention and concentration.