The Relaxation Handbook: Using Your Mind to Find Inner Calm

How to Use Your Brain to be Happy – Using Relaxation Techniques
Preface: Why Do We Need to Relax?

This book is not just another book on relaxation techniques. It differs in an important respect in that it encourages you to think about and try out new things. At the same time, it tells you all about the most important methods of relaxation for body and mind that work using the brain.

A great deal has been written on this subject, since it is one that affects us all. But little has been said about the interrelationships between the various techniques and how to use your brain. Dozens of methods are available today. But I am convinced they all have **one aspect in common: they all recognize that we need to budget some time for ourselves every day to unwind and to allow mind and body to become revitalized**. The path to achieving balance is not the same for all people. However, what most of us do have in common is the fact that we waste 50% of our whole energy because we don't make proper use of it.
We become annoyed at trivialities, we try too hard to please others, we try to do our work to perfection; in this way, our mind is neglected. Many people then realize, midway through their lives, that they have missed out on something. We should all have one common objective: to have enough energy to feel well, cope with anxieties and depressive conditions, and get to grips with partnership and occupational problems. These are, of course, ideals to which we all aspire. But the path is often stony and may require a lot of willpower.

- **Intelligence alone does not guarantee happiness and success in life** – personality and charisma are equally significant. Your ability to communicate and empathize also determines inner happiness and satisfaction. In this book I have therefore described the most important medical relaxation techniques, together with a practical guide on how to put them into practice. I have placed particular emphasis on describing the processes and learning abilities of the brain. After all, the little gray cells of our "on−board computer" are the starting point of all the vital functions of body and mind. The psychological questionnaires and tests I have included are intended to help throw light on your personal situation. Each relaxation technique has its own emphasis and priorities, even if many methods do overlap somehow. But all techniques have a common goal: the achievement of happiness and balance. Try out various different methods and find out which technique suits you best.

- **Being "completely relaxed" does not mean having a wholly inactive body and mind.** It means enjoying a kind of well−being which we can all find individually and with regard to our own psychosomatic conditions. In the first part of this book I have included detailed sections on the brain and its learning abilities.

- Take the time to try out my guidelines: they'll help you achieve inner calm, optimize your strategies for success, and will assist you in finding new creativity. In the course of time, you may learn to 'let go', which will give you more freedom to take up new activities.

- **The aim of my book is to change the way you think, feel and act**, and to show how you can be happier and more satisfied with life. Open the door to the parts of your consciousness that can reveal to you new, creative and satisfying paths. Letting go of old structures and habits, however, means having the courage to try out new things: for example, integrating regular relaxation exercises into your daily routine. It's not simply a matter of having to "believe in it". This book actually introduces you to a

learning process for the body and mind that really can help you to develop a creative and positive consciousness. The most important precondition for this is learning how to assess and evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses. It doesn't involve learning new theoretical strategies; nor does it mean replacing old "constraints" with new ones. Instead, I'll offer solutions and invite you to put them into daily practice.

Too often in the doctor's office I hear: "It's not important to me, it doesn't affect me;" or "I couldn't find time for it;" or "There's no point in doing it – I already know the outcome in advance." Expressions such as "I'm lacking in creativity" or "I don't have the ability to translate my ideas into actions" are even more typical. But if you let your self−esteem slip, you miss out on the chance of becoming happier, more balanced and relaxed. Please take the time to relax with my book.

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THEORETICAL SECTION FOR BRAIN−USERS

Total Relaxation – Motivation from Within
Psychosomatics at its Best
Well−Being Means Different Things to Different People

Anyone who wants to improve their chances of finding success and creativity through conscious relaxation, or who simply wants to learn how to feel well, can, with the help of this manual, discover all about the reasons for psychosomatic processes – both conscious and unconscious – as well as learning about a variety of relaxation techniques. The key to achieving personal fulfillment, however, lies with you alone. You're the one who should be able to motivate yourself. I'll help you, of course, by acquainting you with your own biological clock and other natural rhythms, as well as with the links between the mind and the body that are created and converted in the 'control room' of the brain. You'll notice that my main aim isn't just to write a book on relaxation techniques, but also to describe the links between the processing mechanisms of the brain and stress stimulations in our everyday lives. That is, to show you how the brain reacts to stressful situations. In particular, I'll make you aware of ways in which you can positively intervene with psychosomatic relaxation techniques. You'll discover that the fundamental elements of all these methods are similar.

It is not enough simply to look at the subject from a purely medical or a psychotherapeutic perspective. I'm going to outline traditional and well−established methods from the point of view of a practitioner and specialist. My aim is to find a synthesis of all the best−known forms of relaxation. To prevent 'information over−load', however, I'll limit myself to outlining the key premises of each process as well as the historical origins of that process. You'll then be in a position to choose the means of achieving inner balance that suits you best.

I'll consider various aspects that will help guide you towards inner balance; for example, psychological aids (including self−evaluation tests), and neurolinguistic methods. Since I'm a doctor who specializes in the area of sleep and neurophysiology, and who has also been actively involved in giving therapy to individuals, couples and families for years, I've come to realize that one of the worst consequences of too much tension in our lives, with all the psychosomatic symptoms it triggers, is that it prevents us from seeing the actual problem that needs to be solved. "Organizational blindness" is the greatest impediment to stress management: we lose track and miss all the obvious solutions. That's why before we can make changes, we need to learn about our mechanisms for interpreting mind and body signals.

For this reason it's no bad thing if you have already experienced some problems and decided you must do something about them. This acts as a catalyst for you to want to learn a method of relaxation.

The desire to feel well is perfectly normal and stays with us throughout our lives. By the same token, however, we also have to deal with opposite energies: agitation and tension. Need this be the case? Nearly every day we oscillate between opposite poles of tension and relaxation. All living things, irrespective of what sort or age, seem to orientate themselves around these extremes. Incidentally, it is worth pointing out that we can only really appreciate total relaxation if we have previously experienced the opposite (stress and strain)! I personally believe that the will to think and act positively lies dormant in every one of us. But with psychosomatic illnesses, this drive seems to become diminished, resulting in depression.

Of course, this makes it important that we restore a state of balance and psychosomatic well−being. “Total relaxation” does not therefore mean complete, general passiveness, but rather signifies being able to look within inquisitively. Over the years in which I’ve been running relaxation courses, I’ve repeatedly discovered that a certain amount of tension, or ‘pre−tension’, can have very positive effects in so far as it can motivate and activate.

We must recognize nonetheless the point at which stress begins to be unhealthy. Another task for you is thus to identify your individual stress factors and what causes them. To do this our perception needs to be heightened. Fortunately, this “inner perception” can – and should be – trained. It’s not sufficient just to treat nervous gastric ulcers as a symptom. Rather, we ought to be asking ourselves the question: “What are the causes of repeatedly disturbed gastrointestinal functions?” Maybe they occur because you have repeatedly “swallowed” your stresses and tensions.

New things can only be created in the brain
if the old things are replaced.

Healthy, restful sleep is also necessary for our regeneration. Please allow me, as a sleep expert, to draw your attention to a small but very important fact: only those who sleep healthily can remain fit throughout the day. This point is neglected by many people; but how else do we explain that 30% of all people who suffer from sleeping disorders require treatment for tension or depression at least once in their lives? It is essential that you improve the quality of your sleep to optimize how you are able to cope with stress. But it is also important to sleep properly to be able to learn relaxation techniques better. One of your main objectives in learning how to optimize sleep is to increase the effects of visualization, consciousness and dreaming. After all, being “completely relaxed both day and night” means discovering your optimal level of well−being in the right place at the right time, as well as using the correct methods. This could be daily periods of brief relaxation before going to sleep or during your lunch−break. In the next chapter, I will introduce you to some ‘laws’ of motivation that apply to us all.

Those who live in the past lose sight of the future!

Motivation Made Easy –
Be Your Own "Just−In−Time" Manager

Since having a healthy mind is always linked to self−motivation, I would like to give you some 'impulses' that are worth thinking about. Please take the trouble to read the following statements slowly and carefully:

1) Actively plan the future – it has already just begun.
2) Discover new things. Do not let anything become routine. Look at seemingly everyday phenomena from a different angle.
3) The path to your own resources is gained through experience (= interpreting abilities and experiences correctly for yourself).
4) Learning to succeed can only lead to lasting ability if it is done in a relaxed atmosphere.
5) Free yourself from the pitfalls of your own inattentiveness. You can only identify and learn from key positive experiences gained in the day by repeatedly thinking about the situation afterwards.
6) Remember that there are conscious and subconscious memory capacities regarding the motivation aids I've just listed.
7) Avoid inconstancy in your actions, or ambivalent, 'knee−jerk' reactions. Mature, consistent decisions are better than none at all.
8) Think in images (these can be repeated to heighten positive thought).
9) Using sounds and other sensory impressions (sight, smell, touch and taste), you can train your subconscious; pay attention to impressions of sound, color, etc. that you experience positively. Your subconscious constantly compares new information with previously stored data. Make use of this ability by going over or 'replaying' positive situations from the day just before you go to sleep. Let them have a motivating effect on you.

The smallest of things can strengthen you from within –
if we allow ourselves to perceive them!

It is clear that self−motivation is always guided by perception and aided by learning processes. You can train yourself with the aid of your sensory organs. Remember that the learning process is most successful if you enjoy it. Was there anything you liked learning at school that you didn't enjoy doing? When thinking about changing things you should not replace anxiety−inducing structures and habits with new, compulsive patterns. Rather, consider the possibility of change positively and with pleasure.

This fascinating quote by Karl Jaspers underlines the point:

"People always constitute more than they themselves realize."

Overcoming the Traps of Psychosomatics –
Our Mental Capacity (Brain) Makes it Possible!

"Do not think of a dog." Of course, as soon as you read the word 'dog', you automatically visualized a dog. Memories or associations, you see, are *automatically* retrieved from the data banks in our brain cells. Before you had time to decide whether or not to think about a dog, it had already happened. In recent years, neuroscience has discovered a lot about the location and production of senses like sight, hearing and touch. The first thing to know is that our mind, comprising thought and feeling, also has a material constitution – the brain. Luckily, most of our little gray cells are automated. Consciousness and the ability to perceive the world around us is not linked to, or explained by, just one or more brain cells. Rather, it originates from an interaction between numerous biochemical and electrical impulses. Nevertheless, it is not the simple cell processes and their co−operation alone that make up consciousness.

The substance that comprises the mind has now been revealed, at least to a certain extent, by neurophysiology. For instance, we know that the structure of our brain does not differ from that of any other natural matter. It consists of the chemical elements carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, sulfur, phosphorus and traces of metals. These elements form the components of complicated molecules that in turn arrange themselves into the cells of living things. Let's look more closely at one particular type of cell. A nerve cell is one of around 200 kinds of cells that are found in humans. A nerve cell – a neuron – is part of a network that runs like bell wire throughout our body, and converts and enables us to experience all chemical and electrical stimulations in the brain on the level of consciousness – as perceptions. A perception is therefore part of our consciousness and can be stored.

We have located specific areas of the brain in which the mind, i.e. our consciousness, is likely to be seated. One of these, for example, is the limbic system, where many biological rhythms originate and where emotions are perceived. It is never the case that one and the same brain group exists specifically for a single task. Nevertheless, the study of certain brain diseases such as tumors and strokes has led to the mapping of main brain functions to certain areas. Language, thought, the ability to perform complicated movement patterns, our sense of music and so forth, are seated in the cerebral cortex. If brain cells are stimulated electrically in the acoustic regions of the brain humans experience sounds. If different cell areas in the other motoric cortex are stimulated, certain parts of the body will move. Approximately ten billion cells in the cerebral cortex are responsible for such movement processes and brain functions, which often occur automatically. Each nerve cell is individually connected via so−called synapses. According to recent research there are almost 1,000,000,000,000,000 links in the cerebral cortex (i.e. one quadrillion junctions). To give you an idea of dimensions: around one billion such connections can be found in a mass of brain the size of the head of a matchstick. An unimaginable number of connections are therefore possible which, even with the use of future computers and other technical aids, can scarcely be comprehended.

COGNITIVE PROCESSING IN THE BRAIN

PERCEPTION THINKING LEARNING

Outer world with stimuli

Inner physical factors:

Height
Hereditary factors

Frontal brain mechanisms control:
- right and left brain exchange
- biorhythm
- consciousness

Cerebellum, motor brain stem mechanisms control:
- unconscious behavior
- reflex behavior
- long−term memory

Sensory channels with receptors and stimulus transport control:
- filtering functions of the nervous system
- central transport
- circuitry in the limbic system of the brain

This sometimes also occurs without central circuitry.

Our little gray cells: How do they work?

Figure:
dendrites
nucleus
cell body
axon
myelin sheath
motor end−plate

Substance and mind: a neuron with cell body and axons. If the tension exceeds a certain threshold, an impulse is triggered at the beginning of the axon. At the end of the axon the impulse causes the entry of calcium, which releases stores of neurotransmitters into the synaptic gap.

As I mentioned earlier, the little gray cells in our brain transport all stimuli in the form of electric and chemical signals. Each and every thought can therefore be ‘explained’ biochemically. The constant transport of material takes place inside each cell, in the so−called axons. These ensure that the neurotransmitters, which are formed in the cell body, are transported via the so−called synaptic gap. If a nerve signal reaches these synaptic ends as an electric impulse, they release certain kinds of molecules into the gap, which in turn act as stimuli for the neighboring cells. Transfer molecules require only a fraction of a thousandth of a second to complete this process. Some molecules inhibit the transmission of signals, while others encourage certain processes even more strongly. The signal is transmitted electrically in the cell body and axon. The chemical conversion into one or more neurotransmitters takes place in the synapse. This then releases another electrical phenomenon in the downstream cell, which transmits the information on further.

If, through the transmission of information through individual nerve cells, we can see that situational perception and awareness is possible, it is even more exciting to consider how such information is stored. Scientists have discovered that synapses form ideal paths among themselves, according to the usefulness of the information. A repeated learning process such as hopping on one leg is actually a highly complicated learning process for certain brain cell groups. The same motion is repeatedly trained (for example, several times a day), which leads to the development and reinforcement of the same synaptic connections in certain brain areas. Once we have repeated this process 20−30 times, the whole procedure is stored. Ideal synaptic connections have been forged, and even after a break we will be able to recall this learning process. Since the brain is capable of learning and storing from a very early stage in our lives, however, to prevent it from becoming crammed full with learning processes, deletions are also possible. This occurs in everyday life. Sometimes it is difficult to remember certain things if they have not occurred (been called up) for some time. Yet some things can be called up almost automatically and unconsciously, due to constant repetition. One example of this is riding a bicycle. The above−mentioned learning processes also apply to mental processes, i.e. our memory and the interpretation of experiences, which form the bridge to our consciousness. To quote Voltaire: “What is a thought? It is an image that my brain paints.” The illustration below shows the main features of the left and right cerebral hemispheres.

Face

Left cerebral hemisphere

controlled information processing

- analytical, logical thinking (intellectual), linguistic
  - processes one symbol after the other (serial)
  - processes in binary mode: yes−no, 0/1
    - conscious
    - temporal
    - strenuous
    - optimistic
    - being awake

Right cerebral hemisphere

automatic information processing

- synthetic, holistic thinking (intuitive)
  - illustrative, spatial
  - melodic
  - processes parallel, interrelated
  - processes creatively
    - predominantly unconscious
    - timeless
    - less strenuous
    - pessimistic
    - dreaming

Back of the head (cross−section)

The Brain as Man's Control Room – Make Use of Your Most Valuable Possession

This might come as a surprise, but at birth we do not automatically know how to use our brains. Since our control room, the brain, is the central point of all instinctive, mental and action−related processes, however, it is high time we became acquainted with how to use it to optimum effect. From birth onwards (in fact, even before birth), an eternal learning process begins. Over the course of our lives we learn at unconscious and conscious levels. For example, a toddler acquiring its mother tongue undergoes an unconscious learning process that is then consciously used when he or she begins to articulate thought through speech. If, later in life, we want to master another language, we find it immeasurably more difficult because we now have to learn new rules consciously. The following information applies to all learning processes: our brains retain important things in the memory for a long period of time, sometimes even for an unlimited period, while other things are quickly deleted. Whether or not something is forgotten, i.e. deleted, depends on the way in which it has been stored. If an urgent process is often repeated, it is considerably harder for the brain to delete it from the memory. All this applies to both 'positive' and 'negative' learning, since bad experiences are saved in the same way as positive ones. Fortunately, we can learn consciously to eradicate negative experiences. Simply use this 'manual for the brain' to enable you to achieve, and regularly retrieve, a positive sense of well−being and psychological equilibrium.

These learning steps are shown in the following model:

The RTA Model

R = recognize
Here, I mean recognition of the situation at hand. This frequently takes place via the sensory organs – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

T = think
By this, I mean the conscious process by which we interpret and assess external impressions. At the same time, thought enables us to be flexible in our assessment of the situation at hand.

A = act
This is the conversion of the recognition, changing and thinking processes. After filtering, we anchor and store information, saving what we consider to be most important. We can train this with a relaxation technique that gives emphasis to sensory organs. Eventually, we will be able to call up automatically the positive feeling of psychosomatic fitness whenever we want.

Before we go on, it is important that you get to know your personal instruments of perception – the means by which you experience the world – a little better. I'm referring, of course, to your five senses. Determine where the main focus of your sensory impressions lies using the questionnaire on page X. For some people, it might be 'touch' (kinesthetic experience); for others it could be 'smell' (olfactory experience). It's all part and parcel of understanding how to use your brain for positive memory storage.

Relaxation at any price? No!

Perceiving reality is difficult for many people

Concentration and composure can be consciously trained through a number of relaxation exercises. The various paths leading to relaxation might be very different; but the first thing to be clear about is the meaning of concentrated relaxation. We should also understand how conscious and unconscious processes within relaxation techniques affect the mind−body axis. Before we turn to psychosomatics and stress phenomena, we need to be aware that all forms of being attentive to our inner selves, and the levels of perceptiveness required to achieve this, are dependent on our state of consciousness. It's important not only to register things optically that we encounter in the course of the day; but also to be able to store them in our brains. Perception via our sensory organs is nothing else than an influx of information that is saved, and is retrievable, using certain filters. The positive effect of improved concentration on our daily waking consciousness is obvious. If we concentrate on what we are doing, we are able to complete our tasks more efficiently. Afterwards, we can remember the details of what we did more clearly. In fact, forgetfulness might simply be a consequence of a lack of attentiveness.

Since all forms of relaxation are a kind of "looking within oneself", the ability to concentrate and compose our minds is an important experience that can lead us to our essential selves. Over the day, however, our mind, body and emotions are frequently bombarded with a barrage of stimuli, so that we are never really able to reflect on the true value of attentiveness and concentration. One of the advantages of inner composure is that in this state we are able to decide precisely what we want in the forefront of our minds, and can filter everything else out. Something all relaxation exercises have in common is the importance they attach to improving inner composure: that is, the emphasis they place on improving the ability to steer one's attention towards a certain desired point. Another thing to note is that whenever we are attentive to something, turn within ourselves, or consciously retrieve something, we work mainly with images. Close your eyes and think of your last holiday, a beautiful sunset at the beach, or the sound of waves crashing – conjure up an image in your mind that conveys to you the feelings you experienced there.

What is nicer that a sunset at the beach?
Being able to look forward to the next one!

cerebrum interbrain mid−brain cerebellum

limbic system
thalamus
hypothalamus
sleeping center

Cross−section of a human brain (schematic illustration). Even though the individual centers of the brain are separated, they are still linked to each other, work together, and influence each another.

The Brain and Consciousness – Brain−Maps

What is “Consciousness” and “Subconsciousness”?

If you want to achieve inner calm with relaxation methods, there are several steps that must be taken. But you don’t need any esoteric aids or blind faith; all you need is the ability and willpower to embark on a conscious process. Following the analytic model of Sigmund Freud, I’m going to sketch a mental map comprising three levels.

First level:
The first level in our consciousness is in our waking state, linked to attentiveness. It deals with the sensory impressions we receive daily, with the emotions or sensations we experience in everyday situations. In other words, this is our consciousness. It handles all our waking interactions with other people.

Second level:
This is the preconscious mental state that contains all the information stored in our heads, even if at this stage it does not correspond to our conscious attentiveness. We are, however, able to retrieve images from this preconsciousness using thought. Think of your home. You probably weren’t thinking about it before I asked you to, but now you are able to remember the appearance of the rooms, and picture where the furniture is positioned, and so on. These linked pictorial impressions in our consciousness can arise from our preconsciousness.

Third level:
This comprises the unconscious, those parts that are not immediately accessible to the conscious or preconscious mind. Carl Gustav Jung, who was also a psychoanalyst, subdivided the unconscious into the *personal* unconscious, which he related to our individual history, and the *collective* unconscious, which encompasses inherited initial functions. This latter aspect includes the emotional and spiritual longings of humans, and, according to Jung, also contains so−called “archetypes” stored deep within us. Here Jung included general concepts such as “mother” and “father”, terms that have had a similar meaning in the past throughout the world. The unconscious level is therefore not only storage space for preconscious and conscious experiences at the intellectual level, but also contains deeper behavioral patterns and instincts. With the aid of suitable techniques such as hypnosis, dream analysis and meditation we can gain access to unconscious levels. Several relaxation techniques mentioned later on in this book address all three levels of consciousness, leading to a complete state of balance.

Biological Rhythms – The Inner 'Clocks' of the Brain
How do they Work? How do we Learn?

Use your Consciousness – It's the Best Way to Combat Boredom!

The little gray cells in our brain pass on all stimuli in the form of electric and chemical signals. Each thought, then, can be explained biochemically. The constant transportation of material takes place inside each cell, in the so−called axons. These ensure that the neurotransmitters formed in the cell body are transported further over the so−called synaptic gap. Once a nerve signal reaches these synaptic ends as an electric impulse, certain molecules are released into the gap, which in turn act as a stimulus for the next cell. These 'transfer' molecules require only a fraction of a thousandth of a second for this process. Some molecules work to inhibit the transmission of signals, while others model certain processes even more strongly. The signal is transmitted electrically in the cell body and axon. The chemical conversion into one or more neurotransmitters takes place in the synapse, triggering another electrical phenomenon in the downstream cell, which in turn can either inhibit or encourage further impulses. If our brain is not in a position to emit enough impulse−inhibiting transmitters, an unbridled increase in the number of impulses could occur, leading, for example, to an epileptic fit.

All processes concerned with the mind−body axis are subject to a rhythm that is inherited and runs automatically. Some cells pass on cyclic signals, controlling for instance the feeling of tiredness (which is dependent on the influence of light). Certain cell groups in the nucleus of the hypothalamus of our brain then pass on the sleeping−waking impulse. If such biorhythms are disturbed (by shift−work, intercontinental flights, illness or pain), our sleep is also disturbed. These natural rhythms are always influenced by external stimuli. Let us take light as an example: it is taken in by the optic nerve, which passes on impulses to the cerebral cortex; these impulses then discharge molecules that drive away tiredness. Our natural sleeping−waking rhythm would be set to 25 hours if the earth's periods of daylight and darkness did not stipulate a 24−hour day.

Recent research has shown that a child already develops its own natural dynamics and biorhythms in the womb, although these are influenced to some extent by its mother's cycles. At birth, all the child's nerve cells are in place and possess their own dynamics. In the first phases of life the number of neurons increases; they grow and branch off, and synapses, like networked electric switches, make contact with them. As previously mentioned, the act of processing stimuli that arise through the toddler's life experiences further form and reinforce certain paths in the brain. In this way, various bodily processes and functions, as well as behavioral patterns, become automated and do not need to be learned through repetition. Perhaps you now understand why the question "What is acquired and learned, and what is instinctive?" cannot be answered unequivocally. From a scientific point of view, the basic network of nerve cells is hereditary; everything else that is "done" or "learned" from the first day of one's life is then acquired. If, therefore, at the beginning of our lives, the numerous labile and trainable synapses are still 'open' regarding the contacts they can establish, in the course of our lives these synapses begin automatically to use 'tried and tested' connections and ingrained paths in the neuronal network. If the stimuli one would expect to receive from a sensory organ are withheld from a person over a long period of time, the nerve connections can disappear as the synapses become free for other contacts in the network. This can best be explained using illness as an example. If a child is born with a cataract (that is, when the crystalline lens of the eye is totally opaque), it must be operated on at an early stage since the visual obstacle, in this case the clouded lens, can lead to the complete degeneration of the

optic nerve. If the operation is left too late, the child will never be able to see, since the pathways of the optic nerve will have degenerated. So you can appreciate how every infant strengthens and reinforces the nerve pathways for a particular sensation over time through each relevant sensory experience (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste). Unused circuits and neurons become uncoupled, degenerate, and eventually disappear. This is why severe illnesses that occur at an early age can be responsible for life−long changes to the brain. And the older we become, the less residual plasticity we possess. Fortunately, these circuits are not completely lost; if they were, we would have no ability to learn later in life. But we need to be aware of the reasons why certain things like learning a foreign language become difficult after a certain age. You've probably heard of the adage, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." This isn't actually strictly true; but it definitely becomes more difficult to learn certain tasks as we get older. We can hardly prevent our brain from becoming worn; which is why it is important to slow down this wear by using any free nerve cell groups, even in old age. According to recent research, these free nerve cells are kept as 'replacements' that help retain a degree of plasticity in our brains even when we are very old. The fact that some 80− and 90−year−olds can still be mentally active is simply due to the fact that they have continued to be challenged by stimuli from their surroundings. The dictum "keep active!" is therefore equally applicable to our brain and its little gray cells, as to our bodies. Creativity, together with positive thinking, is particularly important in slowing down the mental aging process. Use your common sense to understand how you can best recharge the battery of your mind and body at various stages of your life. A positive self−consciousness provides you with the freedom to let go of unimportant things and lets you concentrate on what is useful. The terms mentioned above have a close relationship with each other: common sense presupposes understanding and understanding in turn requires conscious common sense.

Lasting Tracks in the Brain – How our Memory Works – Basic Instinct

The reason we can retrieve relaxation techniques we have learned is the brain's capacity for storage. Even though we might have left school years ago, we continue learning all the time and are continually absorbing new information delivered to us by our sensory organs. This occurs both consciously and unconsciously. The brain is kept very busy processing all this information, filtering out what is important and what is unimportant in our everyday lives. For example, the objects registered by our eyes only become *consciously* perceived by us once the individual images have been processed by the brain. Similarly, sound−waves that reach our ears are only really heard and experienced by us – are only pleasing to us – once they have been perceived, processed and interpreted by the brain. The conscious and unconscious processes that take place in this complicated filtering process play a decisive role in the way our memory works. But not only that. When information is absorbed by our brain, it is compared with many other stored memories; it is then either registered as having value and is stored, or it is immediately forgotten as "trivial". Theories about the way we learn stipulate that constant repetition encourages the storage capacity of our brain. It is therefore particularly important that relaxation exercises are practiced every day to enable positive memories to be formed. Then, as described earlier, within the neuronal facilitation of the nerve cells a retrievable automatism comes into being. Memory formation in our brain takes place in many areas – in those areas responsible for movement (where we learn motor skills as, for example, when a toddler learns to walk), as well as in those responsible for processing emotions (where we 'learn' feelings such as security, love and aggression). The nerve cells have to exchange information among each other to ensure optimum neuronal network function. This 'exchange' takes place via long extensions to the nerves called axons. Information is sent as electric impulses along the axons and passed on to adjacent nerve cells at contact points called synapses. Here, the electric impulses cause the release of chemical messenger substances known as neurotransmitters, which bridge the small gap between the ends of nerve cells. These neurotransmitters cause an electric impulse to be released into the cell membrane and the cell itself, which is then passed on in turn.
This process of perception is precisely what happens in the brain when it forms memories.

Our consciousness depends on mental and bodily processes.

The conscious sensory perception of our physical state during relaxation is passed on via electric and biochemical paths to the brain; this perception can then be saved as a positive mosaic building block. Each feeling can also be comprehended biochemically. The "chemistry of the mind" can, for instance, be positively altered by a beautiful sunset (leading to reduction in adrenaline).

A special effect benefits the psychophysical and mental relaxation process: changes effected through repeatedly positive bodily awareness can become more positively established and deeper inscribed into our memories. Investigations have even shown that the experiences of the individual synapses of nerve cells leave behind visible changes (the neuronal facilitation mentioned above can be physically measured). If the same nerve−cell pathways and synapses are used over and over again, then the next stimuli that pass through this way are favored. As far as the long−term memory is concerned, this means that the transmission of information is increased between the synapses. There will then be more synapses on this pathway, which increase in size, strengthening the circuit. In practice, this essentially means that it is sometimes sufficient simply to remember doing positive relaxation techniques in order to trigger a physical effect that makes us feel good.

The fact that we are not able to remember all the information that rains down on our brain every day via our sensory organs is, generally speaking, not a sign of a bad memory, but proof that our conscious and unconscious selection process is targeted. That is to say, our brain differentiates between things that are worth remembering and things that are not so important. This mechanism prevents the huge number of impressions that we receive from the world cluttering up our minds. It is generally considered that the first 'importance' assessment takes place in the limbic system (the central part of the brain), in evolutionary terms a very old region of our brain in which it is thought that our feelings and emotions are situated. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that events that have deeply affected us in the past leave behind particularly intensive and 'deep' memory tracks.

PERCEPTION AND PROCESSING IN THE BRAIN

Memories Mental images and pictures
Patterns gained

Inner perception and emotional evaluation
Limbic system
Perception via sensory organs

Stimuli from our surroundings: optic, acoustic, etc.

The length of time a memory lasts usually depends on which area of the brain's storage system the information in it is processed, and how intensive the stimulus was or is. If a piece of information lands in the so−called ultrashort−term memory, it will have been classified as of little importance and only remains retrievable for a few seconds. Indeed, we are barely conscious of such information and perceptions. Some things we learn are also stored in the short−term memory, and remain retrievable for between five minutes and several hours. In such cases, we can consciously strengthen our perception of them by repetition. Some examples of this would be: learning vocabulary, reading newspapers, and contemplating articles.

Only about 1% (!) of our sensory perceptions makes it through these two filters to the long−term memory. It is not yet exactly clear how tracks are laid in our long−term memory. There is some scientific proof that proteins are stored (as 'memory molecules') in certain patterns that constitute memories. On the other hand, electrophysiological processes are probably also responsible for this; you might compare it to the magnetic strip of an audio cassette in which the electromagnetic particles are arranged according to the information. If we constantly had to produce more and more proteins in the brain for each piece of new information learned, our brains would soon contain enormous amounts of protein. It is assumed that such memory molecules dissolve in the course of time in order to make space for new connections. But certain fragments remain in the brain for the rest of our lives.

Letting go saves energy!

Nevertheless, each new memory doesn't cause a certain part of the brain to change completely; nowadays it is assumed that information is broken down into many "jigsaw pieces" and stored in different parts of the brain. If a small piece is appealed to, for instance, by sensory impression when we observe clouds or enjoy a sunset, then other situations such as your last holiday or past events may be called to mind. That is, part of a "memory chain"

has been activated; the brain attempts to reconstruct the rest. Our memory can sometimes let us down with such reconstructions, however. For example, we may have revised thoroughly for an examination, but at the decisive moment nothing seems to be retrievable from our "storage system". In this case, our stress hormones and general overstimulation from outside cancel the neurotransmitters and impede or even completely interrupt temporarily the process by which memories are retrieved.

Relaxation helps us to prevent things like this occurring. It's not simply true to say that we always learn better and more effectively in a relaxed atmosphere, however; it's also often the case in unusual and stressful situations that we are less liable to be thrown off the track. By understanding these processes, we can see that individual relaxation can support and even expand our memory capacity, since disturbances through excessive stress are prevented or reduced.

Stress, as long as it's in small doses, can help fend off boredom!

If, in the course of our lives, our brain constantly changes, filtering old and new memories in both the positive and negative areas of perception, then we should start to think about how we might prevent ourselves from becoming forgetful. The 100 billion or so nerve cells that we are born with need to be trained so that they retain only those things that we want them to in our long−term memories. As I've already described, a complex neuronal network only comes into being once the nerve cells are linked to one another. It takes up to the first two years of our life for the cells to be sufficiently networked so that new things in our memories can be used as a 'learned' experience. (Prior to this, the human brain is fully occupied with complex learning processes, such as learning how to walk.) But this circuitry in the brain is only formed when nerve cells are stimulated. This is why babies need ample stimuli from outside in order to develop normally. The acts of perceiving things through touch or smell, or hearing voices and other sounds, or registering movements and other optic impressions, determine when, how and with what precision the nerve cells become linked to one another. Babies who spend most of their first year alone in bed, for instance, do not develop so quickly. Such babies are often not even able to sit up at the age of two years. Other vital processes are also learned, trained and stored much more slowly, if at all, in such cases. In the course of our lives, the brain decreases in weight. After twenty years, the brain reaches the pinnacle of its networking efficiency. After this time, it starts to age – in other words, it starts going downhill! Nerve extensions waste away while others have to take on additional tasks to compensate. This slight decline is only noticeable though from the age of 50 to 70. It is therefore important to ensure that age−related "signs of wear" are not permitted to lead to noticeable losses in brain performance; and we do this by training our "mental resources" sufficiently beforehand. 'Degradation' of the mind is often triggered by pathological brain processes that ultimately speed up the ageing process. Thus the following adage applies to our brains: "training keeps you fit in all respects". The earlier you take up "brain jogging" the better.

The following steps can help prevent general forgetfulness:

- Improve your memory by using different parts of your brain. You can do this by turning your thoughts into images several times a day, or by imagining how something smells or feels, and so on. The more sensory channels you activate the better. Don't just remember somebody's name – try to remember as many things about that person as you can. What color were their clothes? Could you smell anything? How did their handshake feel?

- To prevent a general state of overstimulation, it is important that we develop our long−term memory. Take notes, write down things that you definitely don't want to forget, perhaps in the form of a diary or an 'inner' appointments calendar. For example, you could jot down a brief summary of books or films you have enjoyed. It remains in your brain longer like this, and by creating the diary you also free up "storage space" for other information.

- Challenge your brain occasionally using special memory training techniques. Your brain has to be kept active, just like your body.

- Solve crossword puzzles, perhaps take up chess, read the daily newspaper.

- Physical training can also enhance the brain's performance by improving the circulation. After all, our little gray cells can only function properly if they receive enough oxygen. All kinds of physical activity that promote muscle power and stamina are ideally suited. Even daily walks in the fresh air can be beneficial, since they increase the cerebral blood flow.

- Physical exercises that demand coordination are particularly good at preventing general forgetfulness. Dancing regularly, for instance, can help keep your little gray cells fit.

- Often, many things we want to retain in our long−term memory cannot be stored there because we are too stressed and nervous. In this case, relaxation methods that simultaneously develop concentration are recommended. The methods I describe in this book such as autogenic training, meditation and similar relaxation exercises are particularly well suited to this purpose.

- Certain plant−based, 'natural' preparations that provide the essential nutrients our bodies need are also good at helping the brain manufacture 'messenger' substances, and can lead to a slight improvement in the metabolic condition of our nerve cells. Nicotine, on the other hand, actually prevents the supply of such messenger substances.

Be Your Own Coach

Changing your Consciousness Positively

1. Get rid of the following attitude: “I don’t have any time left for that.” Actually, for the occurrences and problems of everyday life, and above all for the nice things, there’s always enough time. There’s no point getting worked up about losing time at a red traffic light. By the same token, it is equally useless going to the other extreme and pretending that you feel good about the situation. You should allow yourself to be annoyed, but at the same time you should tell yourself that this emotional attitude isn’t going to help you. Don’t forget that the same situation, often one that you are unable to change, can be viewed from completely different angles. This can help reduce your stress levels. Incidentally, it takes the same amount of time to imagine sitting on a beach, observing the sunset and the clouds, repeating to yourself “This feeling of contentment and tranquility is wonderful”, as it does to be annoyed that you can’t experience such beautiful sunsets at home. Short, positive impulses go a long way to harmonizing your day.

2. When you make any sort of decision at home or at work, you will certainly have considered the facts sufficiently beforehand. Your next step in the decision−making process should be to create an image of what it is you want. Visualize with your eyes closed; conjure up an image, a picture, or just “go crazy”, letting future scenes unfold in your mind’s eye. Lie down for a few minutes, letting your imagination run wild. You might be surprised how enjoyable it is. At any rate, your final decision will now not only be mind−oriented, but also based on your emotions.

3. Break out of familiar boundaries – look over the horizon to things that are alien to you, but which you nonetheless consider interesting. In other words, take a look inside other people’s “cooking pots” (this can also be taken literally, since many people lack the creativity necessary to turn their old eating habits into new ones; that is, to live a healthier life and lose weight). Entertain your brain by observing other areas of life, alternative professional situations, other academic fields, different types of books, and so on. Always remember that opposing dynamics are best for your brain and for your general well−being. By thinking in opposites, you create the possibility of escaping from your daily routine. You will then find that everyday work becomes less of a grind because the general monotony has been broken by other forms of activity.

4. Be aware of the fact that your daily routine provides you with a sufficient input of information. Nearly all this information is received by the brain, and unconsciously processed. All kinds of stimuli (sight, hearing, taste, an awareness of temperature differences, and so on) are there for the taking, even those gleaned from ostensibly tedious places and situations. Take some time to allow positive stimuli, which your brain interprets by ‘pre−filtering’, to have an effect on you. For example, when you go for a walk in the woods to escape the general stress at work, take advantage of the opportunity to let the stress subside and to enjoy the color of the meadows, sky or the clouds. I don’t mean that you should ruminate for hours about whether the sky is the same color as your jeans; but you should briefly become conscious of the blue color. Even this short process can result in the synchronization of your brain wave rhythm and in the reduction of your stress levels. You’ll have escaped from your “everyday routine” and have made room for free thoughts. Only such ‘feedback’ situations (that is, when you give yourself brief but positive feedback about the present situation) can

help you improve your vision of the future and make new plans. If you let your ‘default’ mood be improved by such positive impulses as I have described, you’ll find you’ll be able to make all kinds of decisions more easily.

5. Don’t make the mistake of wanting fundamentally to change minor but time−consuming situations in your life. If, for instance, you have planned a dinner with your partner and the left, conscious side of your brain has already decided on the ingredients needed, you’ll realize that you can now concentrate on pleasing the other senses that are also important in the course of the evening. The factual matters of preparation are no longer decisive – the real question is whether the music you play when cooking, or the table decorations will brighten up the evening. It’s not without good reason that we say “with meals, decoration counts as much as the taste.” Once you have ordered the factual things in your job or private life, take a small mental step backwards to observe the whole scene. You don’t need to organize things up to the smallest detail because you’ll risk losing your sense for the “overall picture”. And anyway, you’ll waste a lot of unnecessary energy and take up storage space in your brain that could be used for more pleasant things.

6. In future, try to jot down new ideas that occur to you, then reread them a few days later. This provides free space for your little gray cells because your spontaneous ideas can be filed away and recreated at a later date, rather than worried at over a long period of time. A few days later, you may decide to discard some of your ideas; on the other hand, others may develop. We all know that important political decisions are not made overnight. Ideas should be slept on first before they are put into practice. Your creative, positive potential is retained, but useless and unrealistic ideas are correctly discarded. In this way, you create freedom for your mind, body, thoughts and consciousness.

Your Creative Potential (as Free as a Bird)

If you are committed to introducing certain changes into your life, I'd like to give you the opportunity not only of practicing mental relaxation techniques and learning psychosomatic relaxation procedures, but also of becoming aware of your own psychosomatic changes. You'll realize by now that psychosomatics is not a term for some sort of illness. Rather, it refers to the medical fact that mental and physical conditions are mutually dependent on each other. Emotional changes can cause physical changes, and vice versa. Just as general stress can lead to a gastric ulcer, happier events can also lead to positive physical changes, such as a normalization of the gastrointestinal function. Moreover, psychosomatic reactions frequently take place unconsciously, without us being aware of them. For our everyday lives, this means that even minor instinctive changes can lead to physical improvements. It's not necessary to try and register each minute mental or physical change: it's just important to understand the process. The interchange of psychosomatic reactions associated with the mind−body axis can be used as a mirror for the individual profile of memory processes.

In what follows, I have listed several typical reaction patterns, which you should evaluate. You can use them to analyze your own situation, or you can use the test as a progress control, filling it out once a week and recording any changes to your overall dynamics. We're aiming for a healthy average total. Over time, you can determine whether you're expecting too much or too little of yourself, and can then decide where you want to make small, but positive changes. If your result total is **below 10 points**, you need to implement 'activating' measures for you and your little gray cells immediately (you can use brain−jogging examples from this book). If you're **above** the stimulus threshold, you should rather "let go" more, using relaxation methods to return to the 'positive' area. You can see that there are thoroughly normal reactions and psychosomatic combinations that are also very useful. We're concerned with recognizing our own thresholds, rather than blindly accepting or repressing our own reactions. Incidentally, you should not aim to get as few points as possible: some "pre−tension" – some degree of willingness to react – is more desirable than none. If you use one of the relaxation methods I describe, after just a few months you will have created a positive basis for thought and action. The key to success lies in your own hands: only those who successfully deal with their own crises can develop inner freedom for creativity, and release the hitherto 'locked−up' capacity of the brain.

Where Do Your Strengths and Weaknesses Lie?

Subjective scale of complaints

Test the extent of your psychosomatic complaints. Assess how far the following statements apply to yourself:

does not apply	0 points
hardly applies	1 point
applies substantially	2 points
applies exactly	3 points

Points

I am worried.
I get worked up about trivial things.
I don't feel like doing anything active.
I frequently have physical complaints.

I am often sad.
I am restless.
I am unsure of myself.
I suffer from general feelings of tension within my body.
I am hardly able to do anything.
I frequently suffer from panic attacks.
I am frequently irritable.
I have the feeling that something is not quite right with my body.
I don't really feel like eating.
I feel despondent.
I frequently feel apathetic.
I suffer from a lack of energy.
I am oversensitive.
I am often scared.
I feel tired and exhausted.
I am nervous.
I feel lonely even when I'm in the company of other people.

Total number of points:

Evaluating the test:

Up to 5 points:
You are fine. You suffer from hardly any psychosomatic complaints.

Between 6 and 29 points:
You suffer quite a lot. You should look for help and reconsider the way you conduct your life.

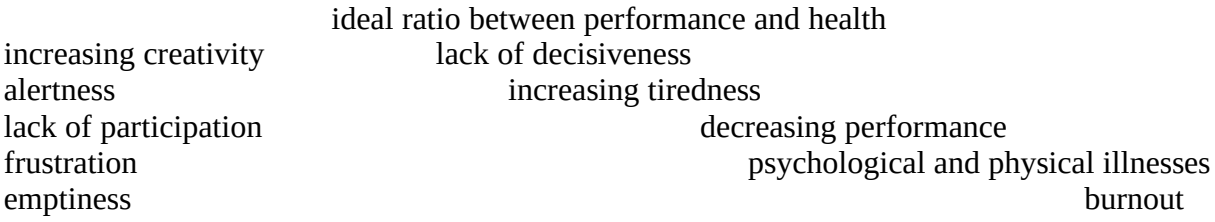
Over 30 points:
It's high time you did something – your complaints are pronounced and require immediate attention.

Positive Psychosomatics:

Well−Being, Health and Performance

As far as helping you achieve a positive state of consciousness is concerned, the psychosomatic ‘test’ from the previous chapter requires that you be honest in assessing yourself; it also demands that you allow yourself to be judged by a ‘third party’. It’s all about finding the happy medium – which, of course, also means acknowledging that different people have different stress boundaries. In general though, there is always a connection between the readiness to react and a general ability to endure stress. In the following diagram, you can see an ideal curve. If one were to step beyond the peak of this curve, the result would be too much stress. So beware of the dangers of having too many demands made on you in your life.

Performance and health



Too much stress

Biorhythm by Day and Night – Sleep Medicine Means Well−Being Throughout the Day

Metronome for Mind and Body. The Effect of Light.

You already know a great deal about the signals that emanate from your body and mind. And you'll also already be aware of how you can influence this sensitive balance in a positive manner. But we should recognize that certain aspects of our natural biorhythm are pre−set. For instance, it is sometimes quite accurate to talk of having "spring feelings" or about not sleeping well when there's a full moon. Similarly, a lack of light along our geographical latitude can indeed lead to depressive moods. We know that light is the most powerful trigger factor for certain biological rhythms. Sunlight – but also the light of the moon – gives the biological structure in our brain a schedule. If we did not have this 'time−keeper', our biological clock would run for 25 hours a day. The extent to which light can govern our feelings depends on seasonal changes and on the intensity and duration of the light's effect. The relationship between light and dark determines the time at which birds build their nests and plants come into flower. From a neurophysiological point of view, we also know that the rhythmic regularity of light is a phenomenon that can charge – as well as run down – our mind−body battery. For vivid proof of this, just consider how difficult it can be after intercontinental flights when we suddenly have to reset our biological clock (backwards or forwards, depending on the continent).

Our receiver organ for light is the pineal gland, which is situated deep in the brain. It corresponds to what the ancient Hindus conceived of as a kind of "third eye". The influence of the pineal gland in the brain is of particular importance to me as a sleep consultant since the production of melatonin, one of the most significant hormones in the pineal gland, controls how we fall asleep. When darkness falls, our melatonin levels rise. If, for example, during the menopause or illness, our melatonin is too low, it can be supplemented with the aid of melatonin capsules. The melatonin in the pineal gland also influences other control systems; for instance, that of seratonin and of histamine, which significantly influences our moods. Hence, taking melatonin in the evening not only promotes deep and peaceful sleep – it also improves our mood. In general then, we can say that nature has given us our own, individual biorhythms; but these can be influenced and controlled by external stimuli, such as light. The various rhythms that influence the mind and body are interlinked, but they adhere to different time patterns. If you know your own biological clock, you'll know that your attentiveness improves every 1½ hours throughout the day, and then goes downhill. This is called an ultradian cycle. By comparison, our general strength and vitality is linked to daily processes (circadian rhythms), as well as to monthly highs and lows. The best−known example is the estrogen cycle, which regulates a woman's menstrual flow. Different−length rhythms can have a mutual influence on each other; "complete relaxation" for the mind and body is only achieved when several rhythms are at a low. This happens, for instance, at night although, as I mentioned earlier, our brain is not inactive at this time – it is merely active in a different way. As you already know, the activity of our optic cortex is also heightened cyclically. This can be seen with dreams: and if, in the morning, we can still remember our dreams, we are experiencing partial access to the last cyclical dream phase of the "cinema in our brains".

By "complete relaxation", I mean when we manage through relaxation processes to become aware not only of the sensitive signals that our body sends out in certain specific situations, but also throughout the day; and what is more, to act in accordance with them. Our age, of course, plays a role here. We should be especially aware of children's rhythms and trust in their natural feelings. The unfortunate thing is, there are enough constraints placed from

outside to disrupt these rhythms. Children, for example, have to start school at 8 a.m., and work according to timetables that have been drawn up arbitrarily. For adults, too, night shifts often disturb our natural biorhythms. It is worthwhile listening to the rhythmic messages sent to us by our biological clock – we do ourselves a considerable favor, since, when it is in synch with natural rhythms, our body makes available hundreds of hormones and other substances at the right time and at the right place. Cells divide and are replaced (for instance, hair growth), enzymes and hormones are produced for digestion, heartbeats are automatically regulated and adjusted to physical and mental conditions; everything is rhythmically balanced, tuned and regulated into phases during the day and at night, when we are asleep and awake, for as long as we live. For this reason, you should realize that total harmony is only possible if we avoid irregular habits and try not to disturb natural rhythms by taking drugs, and so on. But the truth is, we often abuse the fine rhythmic balance of life. The relaxation techniques described in this book also represent an attempt to return gradually to a state of natural harmony, even when we're not doing the exercises. Harmony is actually a natural condition, since the human body and its mind represent a self−contained system – we just need to 'get back' to it. People who listen to their body's signals are usually more at one with themselves. They sense that everyone has their own biological clock: biorhythms that set the pace for their moods, as well as the periods when they can regenerate through total relaxation. Some biological rhythms are easy to determine – for example, the 28−day menstrual cycle, the 60 to 80 heartbeats per minute, the day/night rhythm. However, usually we don't notice most biological rhythms, and this is where the danger lies. Gastrointestinal contractions and daydreams occur on a 90−minute cyclic basis. It is, then, hardly surprising that our biological moods are dependent on such rhythms. Perhaps we should become more tolerant towards ourselves by observing our natural lows throughout the day; we might start taking a siesta after lunch.

(Bild: oben beginnend, im Uhrzeigersinn)
Biological Clocks
growth hormone increases

body temperature is at its lowest level
melatonin is at its highest level
cortisol level starts to increase

pulse rate and blood pressure begin to rise
adrenaline increases

prolactin decreases
cortisol is at its highest level
pulse rate increases
body temperature rises

melatonin decreases
noradrenalin increases

the sympathetic nervous system increases activity until midday

body temperature continues to rise

highest blood pressure

melatonin starts to increase

body temperature starts to decrease

blood pressure decreases
pulse rate increases

Many bodily processes are subject to a 60−90−minute rhythm: sleeping phases, bowel contractions, the occurrence of fantasies, periods of activity and tiredness. If you listen to your own rhythms, which vary from person to person, you can learn to optimize your ability to work and concentrate. Rather than trying to work and concentrate during ‘troughs’, you should use these periods to gain an even higher level of harmony and rhythmic balance through deep relaxation.

Test Yourself:

What is My Basic State of Mind?

The following is a typical personality test that will enable you to discover your underlying or 'default' state of mind. As well as finding out how happy (or unhappy) you are, you can also monitor your progress – just answer the questions every 4 to 6 weeks over a period of 6 months, and compare your scores. The lower the total scored from negative questions, the more content and balanced you are, generally speaking. Count the P questions (positive attributes) and N questions (negative attributes) separately and see how your scores compare a couple of months later.

- I am satisfied with my life (P)
- I'm looking for something new to do (N)
- I wait patiently in queues (P)
- I become impatient and irritated in queues (N)
- I feel it's not worth getting worked up about things (P)
- I often fly into a rage (N)
- I listen to others (P)
- I frequently interrupt others and complete their sentences for them (N)
- I walk leisurely (P)
- I walk very quickly (N)
- I speak slowly (P)
- I speak very quickly (N)
- I am at ease with myself and what I have achieved (P)
- I need to be praised by others (N)
- I am always on time for engagements (P)
- I hurry to get to engagements (N)
- I tend to do one thing at a time (P)
- I do several things at the same time (N)
- I don't need an engagements diary (P)
- I couldn't live without an engagements diary (N)
- I never dream of not being able to manage something (P)
- I often dream of not completing a task on time (N)
- My motto is: What I don't manage today, I'll do tomorrow (P)
- My motto is: Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today (P)
- I always have time (P)
- I often have no time (N)

It is obvious from the questions that we're interested in taking a 'snap−shot' of your basic frame of mind. If, over the course of time, the number of negative statements you tick is reduced, then you will have changed from being irritated to being more content, from being moody to being much happier.

Stressors and Stress Reactions

Stressors

(events that cause stress)

perception and evaluation

learning experience
‘defense mechanisms’
‘cognitive style’

Stress
(subjectively experienced strain) coping with stress

Stress Reactions
psychological:
e.g. fear, depressive syndrome

behavioral:
e.g. heavy smoking, fleeing, suicide attempts

physiological:
raised blood pressure, tachycardia, arrhythmia, skin reactions (pruritus), increased intestinal peristalsis, vasoconstriction, release of glucocorticoid, altered immune reaction, etc.

Psychosomatic Illnesses

After Dr. Dr. Köhler

Social, physical, mental stress – primary condition – secondary stress condition

Biological Rhythms and Stress – One Person's Friend, Another Person's Enemy

Stress is the Message – Letting Go is the Answer

The term "stress" and the effect of stress is not identical with illness or being made ill. It's important to differentiate between positive and negative stimuli: so−called eustress and distress. Distress results from long−term stimuli – internal or external – that overtax us and make us ill. If distress affects us for periods of months or even years, and nothing is done about it, psychosomatic disorders (that is, an imbalance between bodily and mental functions), may occur. Indeed, we can define psychosomatic disorders as the 'learned' maladjustment of our bodily organism in relation to conscious and unconscious mental processes.

Chronic overactivity disturbs our inner balance; this imbalance is expressed in the form of mental anxiety and depressive conditions, as well as by actual changes to organs. The ultimate condition of permanent stress arises when our organism is prevented from returning to its original state in phases of relaxation. Brief phases of rest are then no longer sufficient to return from a highly increased level of activity to an original position. At the beginning of this stage, our general performance decreases, while at a later stage illness occurs. The graph shows the relationship between the influence of stimuli over a period of time.

Performance
Success
Phases
Insufficient demands
Performance
Eustress
Distress
Effort
Time axis

Phase 0: Underchallenged. A lack of stimuli from the outside and not enough demands on the mind and body leads to psychosomatic illnesses.

Phase 1: In this phase, a healthy ratio between the willingness to act and achieving success is built up (increased effort = more success).

Phase 2: Optimum success and psychophysical well−being in which a willingness to act lies well within the individual's mental and physical boundaries (eustress).

Phase 3: Plateau phase. Extreme danger of being continually overtaxed. Increased effort no longer leads to increased success. Vegetative disorders such as sleeplessness, irritability, panic attacks and mood swings set in (distress).

Phase 4: State of collapse on the mind−body level, possibly with psychosomatic illnesses (heart attack, gastric ulcer, depression).

In the language of stress researchers, long−term stress – that is, a state of distress – leads to a so−called adjustment illness; neither the mind or the body can adjust to stress situations, and cannot therefore reduce or eradicate them. The term 'stress' has become a catchword in the

process. As early as 1950 a well−known stress researcher, Hans Selje, described distress as follows:

"Strain, noise, hurry, frustration, pain, existential fear, tension, mental and physical pressure."

As you will appreciate, virtually all of us are confronted with one or more of these factors in our life. We should therefore do something to counteract their possible negative effects as early as we can. Stress threatens our health and well−being. On the other hand, I mentioned that we all need a certain amount of stress in order to live healthily. A complete lack of stimuli leads to illness as surely as being overtaxed by too many stimuli. If internal and external stimuli are absent, we become dull, depressive, and suffer organ damage – just as we do in situations where we are overtaxed. We should, therefore, view stress as having two different meanings: positive and negative. Stress does not affect us all in the same way – we all deal with it differently, according to personal and individually learned behavior patterns. It is important to understand that stress could be damaging to one person, but beneficial to another.

Typical Stressors and Stress Reactions at the Psychosomatic Level:

Sight, Taste, Smell, Hearing, Touch – The Sensory Channels of Psychosomatics

In old age, we are often undertaxed because of a lack of stimulus. Residents in nursing homes, for instance, who often have to contend with a lack of inner motivation or stimulus from outside, can suffer from additional physical ailments – or else already existing illnesses get worse. Many elderly people's only aim and sense in life is dealing with their illnesses. In such cases, lack−of−activity syndrome has to be tackled. The trick is to reactivate these individuals' physical and mental capacities through use. The ageing process can then be slowed down at this mental level. The feeling of having achieved something can lead to a real reduction in stress, a sense of well−being, and a higher quality of life. The deterioration of certain senses such as hearing or sight in old age, or the arrival of other limitations through illness, does not contradict this theory. These people simply need stronger external stimuli via the sensory channels that are still functioning as compensation. A simple conversation with someone can have such a refreshing effect in this respect, even if only banalities are exchanged. It helps the mind to remain active and dynamic.

General factors that equate with stress for almost all of us are listed in the following "life−event" chart. Read the factors to determine which ones affect you. Add up the points you score. If you end up with a total of between 300 and 350 points, your situation is critical and you need to look for a solution strategy, as described in this book, immediately.

Self−Test Questionnaire

Life Event		**Points**
1.	Death of husband or wife	100
2.	Divorce	73
3.	Separation from husband or wife	65
4.	Involuntary period in prison or similar institution	63
5.	Death of a close relative	63
6.	Serious physical injury or illness	53
7.	Marriage	50
8.	Dismissal by employer	47
9.	Reconciliation with husband or wife	45
10.	Retirement	45
11.	Considerable change in health or behavior of a family member	44
12.	Pregnancy	40
13.	Sexual difficulties	39
14.	Expansion of the family (e.g. by birth, adoption or an elderly relative moving in, etc.)	39
15.	Major business changes (e.g. fusion, new organization, bankruptcy, etc.)	39
16.	Considerable change to financial situation (a severe deterioration or considerable improvement)	38
17.	Death of a close friend	37

18.	Change of job	36
19.	Major change in the number of arguments with husband or wife (e.g. more or less frequent arguments about raising the children, personal habits, etc.)	35
20.	Taking out a mortgage over $ 47,000 (e.g. to buy a house, business, etc.)	31
21.	Lapse of a mortgage or loan	30
22.	Considerable change in area of responsibility at work (promotion, demotion, transfer)	29
23.	Son or daughter moves out (e.g. due to marriage or college)	29
24.	Problems with parents−in−law	29
25.	Exceptional personal achievement	28
26.	Wife commences or stops working outside the home	26
27.	Beginning or end of vocational training	26
28.	Significant change in living conditions (e.g. new house, renovation, deterioration of house or residential area)	25
29.	Change in personal habits (clothing, manners, personal ties, etc.)	24
30.	Difficulties with superior	23
31.	Major changes in working hours or conditions	20
32.	Change in place of residence	20
33.	Change of school	20
34.	Significant difference in type and/or amount of relaxation	19
35.	Considerable change in church activity (e.g. much more or less than usual)	19
36.	Considerable change in social activities (e.g. clubs, dancing, cinema, visits, etc.)	18
37.	Taking out a mortgage or loan of less than $ 9,500 (e.g. to buy a car, television set, freezer, etc.)	17
38.	Significant alteration of sleeping habits (much more or less sleep or different sleeping times)	16
39.	Major change in the frequency of family meetings (much more or less frequent than usual)	15
40.	Considerable change in eating habits (much larger or smaller portions, different eating times or locations)	15
41.	Vacation	13
42.	Christmas	12
43.	Minor criminal offences (traffic−related, traffic violation as a pedestrian, breach of the peace, etc.)	13

Source: Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe: Holmes−Rahe
Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 1967, 2.

Interpretation

0 to 150 points:
Your level of stress, which is situated in the eustress region, is just about right. This amount of stress should not damage your health.

151 to 300 points:
If you amassed this number of points, your health is already at risk from too much stress. The probability that stress will cause problems to your health is 51%. You should visit your doctor to enquire about ways of reducing stress, such as autogenic training.

over 301 points:
Your risk of serious illness due to increased stress is 80%! If you have scored over 301 points, you are urgently advised to visit your doctor, since your health is probably already seriously affected. It is paramount that you find a method of reducing stress that suits you best.

Consciousness and Sleep
Sleep Yourself Fit

... because consciousness also includes dreaming!

Sleep, along with food, is one of our basic requirements. Sleeping is not a luxury, but an important factor in determining how we feel and experience things through primarily unconscious channels. As most of you will already know, lack of healthy sleep makes us more irritable and lethargic, and reduces our ability to concentrate. Our fitness level also deteriorates rapidly, and can become dangerously low. Constant lack of sleep can considerably alter our behavior, lead to hallucinations, and over a long period of time cause illness.

Sleep also has its own biorhythm. We experience regular dream phases – so−called “rapid−eye−movement” (REM) phases – which constitute around 20% of our total sleeping time. This harmonious rhythm of regular dreaming leads to mental harmony, although strictly speaking the brain is never idle. The activity that takes place over the course of the day in the left half of the brain is subdued at night, while that which occurs in the right half of the brain, as described above, is responsible for processing the ‘inner films’, dreams and desires of the present and the past.

The ‘right’ quantity of sleep varies from person to person. From a scientific point of view, we need less sleep the older we get. The inner biological clock that is responsible for regulating our sleep patterns is closely linked to other metabolic processes, hormonal regulations, and so on. Sleep is, therefore, simply another form of brain activity which we require like any other. Around 80% of the time we spend sleeping is made up of light and deep sleep. These periods are interspersed with dreaming phases, during which our unconsciousness tries to cope with the problems we encountered during the day. Even if our individual biorhythms are extremely varied, as a rule of thumb we can say that around 6½ hours of sleep is ideal for 20− to 60−year−olds.

With certain relaxation techniques we can attain a trance−like state that is comparable to phases of light sleep in which images emerge. Many people can even achieve a proper dream−like state. Although during sleep we are involuntarily controlled by our biological clock, by using daily relaxation techniques we can learn to ‘steer’ our consciousness. When in a trance, it is even possible for us to play through images or whole ‘films’ in our consciousness. If we do this with the aim of developing a positive and optimistic state of mind, our daydreams can enable us to achieve inner harmony and balance, as well as helping us to reduce stress (just like what occurs in sleep, only perhaps even more intensively). Before turning to the relaxation techniques, I would first like to give you a brief guide on healthy sleep and how to fall asleep easily.

Sleeping Hygiene: The First Step to Total Relaxation and Re−Learning

First, make sure that your bedroom is furnished in such a way that you feel comfortable in it. Not only should it have the right temperature and humidity, but it also needs to be aired regularly. A healthy mattress is also important for quality sleep.

Secondly, you should try to go to bed at roughly the same time every night, even at weekends. Although the exception proves the rule, regular sleeping patterns are conducive to our health.

During the day, you should listen to the signals given out by your body: treat yourself to periods of relaxation if you feel that you need to unwind. Even short periods of relaxation of only a few minutes are beneficial in the daytime. In fact, longer periods of sleep in the day tend to be disadvantageous. If you have difficulties getting to sleep or sleeping through the night, you should avoid taking a midday nap.

What is more, after around 9 p.m., you should avoid eating stodgy, oily or spicy foods. The job of digesting them makes your metabolism too active during the first sleep cycles of the night to achieve a proper state of mental relaxation.

I would also advise you not to drink excessive amounts of coffee or alcohol in the evening, and not to smoke too many cigarettes. Strenuous sport should also be avoided later on in the evening.

If you do experience sleeping problems, only take sedatives when it is absolutely necessary (otherwise you risk addiction).

If your sleep pattern has been disturbed for a longer period of time, let’s say around eight weeks, there may be a number of factors involved, all of which need to be investigated. These could include external factors such as noise at night, shift−work, too much stress and everyday hustle and bustle, as well as bad moods, depression or other worries stemming from seemingly unsolvable problems at work or at home. Moreover, serious physical disorders, such as cardiovascular disease or chronic pain, can also interfere with our night’s sleep. This is why people with severe sleeping disorders need to be thoroughly examined to rule out potential illnesses. Don’t worry though: a night spent awake doesn’t mean you are seriously ill. However, if you find that your sleeping disorders persist, and even start causing you problems in the daytime, I would advise you to have a thorough check−up, including night−time examinations in a sleep laboratory.

Diagram:
The Structure of Sleep

Healthy Sleep

Patient with dysphylaxia

The phenomenon of dreaming during REM phases of sleep is particularly fascinating, since the neurophysiological and psychological basics of psychosomatics formed by our subconsciousness are expressed. It seems reasonable, therefore, that we should want to find out the meaning of our dreams, and possibly even to learn how to influence them. The

interpretation of dreams is often psychologically interesting in so far as it can help to elucidate the meaning of our own personality matrix. But we have to be aware that when we talk about our dreams and try to interpret them, the very fact that we are awake can distort our memory of them and thus their significance. A direct experience of the dreams would be ideal to learn how to achieve a positive consciousness independently of the contents of our brain. Incidentally, you may have heard of 'lucid' dreams: this is when we dream, but at the same time are conscious we are dreaming. Everyone can have lucid dreams. I'm sure many of you are already acquainted with the phenomenon. Maybe you have made up a nice story for your children at bedtime, or have closed your eyes and pictured an image? Well, this is just the same as a lucid dream. By concentrating, we can even take a subject to sleep (into our dreams) with us. We then go on a 'conscious' journey in a dream world that is not subject to the limitations we experience when awake. Time and space both seem endless. We can jump between times and places, or visualize fantasies, and so forth. Possible solutions to problems and such difficult life situations can be played through in our dreams. The advantage is that while you can experience these dream worlds much more vividly than if you only think about them when you are awake, they can always be discarded afterwards since they're only dreams. This procedure can help heal psychosomatic disorders, and may even change the way you lead your life. In your dreams you can try out new things, picturing and 'experiencing' potential versions of your life. Naturally, during the day, the psychological and physical limitations we shake loose in our dreams are very useful, and are often even essential in enabling us to adjust to our surroundings. But equally, eradicating these limitations in dreams and lucid dreams is a crucial aspect in creating a positive consciousness and developing our personality. For instance, in the Second World War many prisoners in concentration camps did not dream about terrible things, as one might expect, but rather of beaches, warmth and general well−being. Their dreams attempted to compensate for the bitter reality of their lives. The brains of such prisoners seemed to call on a built−in self−healing process in their dreams, as an antithesis to the brutal reality of the day.

How to Influence Your Dreams Positively

Influencing Your Dreams is the First Step Towards a Positive Consciousness

'Lucid' dreaming is the term used to describe the phenomenon that occurs when we feel mentally completely awake and 'clear' (*lucid* = 'clear', 'light'), but at the same time we are aware we are dreaming. Fantasy and reality become one, helping us sort out the chaos in our brain's neuronal network. From a neurophysiological point of view, a lucid dream is a highly active phase in REM sleep. During sleep, our brain processes sensory impressions in a different manner to when we are awake. 70% of us dream visually (using stored information from the optic cortex of the brain), and 20% aurally; the others dream using the remaining sensory organs of touch, taste and smell. The state of being in a trance – which I will describe later, and which is used in various different relaxation techniques – is just as beneficial to us as dreaming. Indeed, lucid dreaming, which is even more intense than 'normal' dreaming, enables you to extend your consciousness and influence your dreams in a way that will give you positive thoughts when awake. While certain limitations in perception are virtually essential to enable our consciousness to work optimally and positively during the day, the dreams we have at night not only represent a form of recuperation, but are also a creative expansion of our perception. The simplest and most inspiring way to take a positive consciousness with you into sleep is to fall asleep thinking about pleasant things and beautiful images.

The Various Phases of Sleep

Stage 1
(relaxed drowsiness)

REM stage
(dreaming phase)

Stage 2
(sound light sleep)

Stage 4
(semi−deep sleep)

Stage 5
(deep sleep)

The Epworth Sleepiness Scale

Dear Patient,

This questionnaire is designed to find out how badly you suffer from daytime sleepiness. Gauge how likely you are to doze off or fall asleep in the following situations. (Even if you have not done some of these things recently, try to work out how you *might* have reacted.) Use the following scale to select the most appropriate number for each situation:

0 = I would **never** doze
1 = **slight** chance of dozing
2 = **moderate** chance of dozing
3 = **high** chance of dozing

Situation	**Chance of Dozing**			
Sitting or reading	0	1	2	3
Watching TV	0	1	2	3
Sitting inactive in a public place	0	1	2	3
Traveling as a passenger in a car for an hour without a break	0	1	2	3
Sitting and quietly talking to someone	0	1	2	3
Sitting quietly after lunch (no alcohol)	0	1	2	3
Waiting for a few minutes in stationary traffic	0	1	2	3
Lying down, resting in the afternoon	0	1	2	3

A score of over 10 indicates that you should seek advice and/or treatment for a possible sleeping disorder, since you could be suffering from the so−called Sleep Apnea Syndrome (Ondine's curse).

Which of Your Sensory Channels are Most Receptive?

The following questionnaire helps you discover where your personal strengths and weaknesses lie and may help you to find the relaxation technique that is best suited to you.

Questionnaire: Which senses do your consciously use?
Help in choosing your relaxation technique.

Before we can determine the path to inner relaxation that is best for you, we need to find out which of your sensory channels are most receptive. Read each question and choose a letter. When you have calculated which letter occurs most frequently, read the advice at the end of the chapter pertaining to that letter.

In choosing my partner, I was most impressed by:

a) his or her expressive eyes
b) his or her sonorous voice
c) my partner's skin
d) his or her smell

The things I enjoy most on holiday are:

a) the interesting sights
b) meeting people with whom I get on well and spending free time with them
c) sporting activities and adventure
d) having time to eat and drink

The subject I found most interesting at school was:

a) art
b) English
c) sport
d) biology

Close your eyes and imagine that you are standing in front of a large waterfall:

a) Most of all, I am captivated by the sparkling water and by the way it moves
b) The roaring sound of the water appeals to me most
c) I find the power of the tumbling water most impressive
d) I like the fresh air best and being able to breathe easily

What disturbs me most about other people is when they

a) have no dress sense
b) never let anyone else get a word in edgeways
c) crowd my space
d) wear powerful scent

A dinner can only be a great success if there is/are:

a) a stylish atmosphere
b) trappings, such as music
c) nice people around me
d) exquisite food

For me, unspoiled nature means:

a) lying on a meadow, observing the clouds

b) listening to the splashing of a mountain stream
c) lying on soft grass in a meadow, enjoying the peace
d) smelling the scent of freshly cut hay

If I come home stressed from a day's work, the best way for me to relax is to:

a) go to the movies to take my mind off things
b) listen to a concert
c) go dancing or do some exercise
d) eat something to help me switch off

What influences you most?

a) a person's exceptional style and clothing
b) when someone pays me flattering compliments
c) a tender touch
d) eating my favorite meal

You want to buy a new car, and take it for a test drive. What do you like best?

a) the color and paintwork of the car
b) the sound of the engine
c) the car's road holding and performance
d) the smell of the new upholstery

Which sentences do you tend to use?

a) I can't see the sense of that.
b) I don't understand it at all.
c) I can't get to grips with that.
d) There's something fishy about it.

Which sentences do you typically use to judge situations?

a) It shows something in the wrong light.
b) Do you have to be so loud?
c) I just can't grasp it.
d) I can't stand the smell of this.

When becoming acquainted with new things, I often use the following sentences:

a) I need to get a general overview of the situation.
b) It sounds good to me.
c) The words moved me.
d) It really melts in the mouth.

Add up the number of times you have chosen each letter. The letter you have selected most frequently reveals your character type.

The A Type: As you probably realized when you answered the questions, you mainly perceive the world through your eyes, and think in images. Only when you have processed all the visual impressions around you do you turn to your other sensory organs. It means that you are absorbed by pictorial descriptions, which reveal more to you than a thousand words. It also means that you can remember visual things such as shapes and colors particularly well. You tend to choose your partners according to their appearance, however. Outer attraction is what scintillates you most of all. In general, you can assume that you belong to the 'visual perception' group, which means that, when learning, you ought to work with optical materials

and study aids. In your search for relaxation, you should consider trying methods such as mind mapping. Your ideal form of relaxation could be visualization, autogenic training or biofeedback.

The B Type: I'm sure you're aware that your main sensory in−take occurs via aural or acoustic channels. You are stimulated by acoustic signals such as sounds, words and music. This means that your inner perception is always geared towards language. You place particular importance on *how* something is said, not only on *what* is said. This means that you expect regular conversations with your partner. You can't bear to sit in silence. Since you belong to the 'acoustic perception' group, you learn best when important information is conveyed aurally. Your ideal means of relaxing could be visualization techniques with the aid of music or biofeedback.

The C Type: You belong to the group that processes signals predominantly through touch. You're only able to get close to your surroundings and the experiences they offer through physical contact with them. You can only fully comprehend things once you have touched them. If you can't make a physical analysis of people or things, you find it extremely difficult to approach them. As far as your relationship's concerned, this means that you need high levels of physical contact. For you, security means experiencing and feeling 'inner' things via your hands and skin. The rhythm, movement and physical contact of and to things could help you to learn better. You have probably already realized that when you are learning, pacing the room helps you to grasp things more quickly and easily. With regard to relaxation, I would recommend that you try autogenic training, visualization or t'ai chi.

The D Type: You belong to the so−called 'olfactory' – that is smell−related – perception group. You need smell and taste to pass on messages to your brain. You perceive the world around you using your nose. Only then do you trust your other sensory impressions. Regarding partnerships, smell and taste are incredibly important factors. As far as your ability to learn is concerned, you function best in a pleasantly scented room. I would advise you to experiment with autogenic training, breathing exercises and visualization.

Even if you had guessed beforehand which kind of sensory impressions influence you most, the questionnaire may have helped you to think more deeply about how this knowledge can give you insights into optimizing your daily routine. It may also help in improving your critical judgment.

Test: How Do You Cope With Stress?

The following test encourages you to think about how you react in stressful situations. It is divided into three categories. Simply add up the number of times you answer "yes" to the statements in categories A, B and C, then refer to the key at the end of the chapter to see how you have scored.

Category A:

1. In company, I often talk faster and louder than the others:
   Yes No
2. In conversations I'm quick to steer the topic towards myself:
   Yes No
3. Deep down I often feel rushed and hassled:
   Yes No
4. I've a habit of interrupting people:
   Yes No
5. I often catch myself jigging my foot or some other part of my body:
   Yes No
6. If there are silences in a conversation, I feel compelled to break them:
   Yes No
7. If I fail to do something at the first attempt I get annoyed:
   Yes No

Category B:

1. When I'm with a group of excited people I suddenly feel exhausted:
   Yes No
2. I generally find it difficult to make myself do things:
   Yes No
3. People hardly ever notice when I'm really happy:
   Yes No
4. I'm often considered apathetic:
   Yes No
5. I have difficulty in concentrating and I often fall asleep, regardless of the situation:
   Yes No
6. I often lose myself in my own thoughts and fail to realize what is going on around me:
   Yes No
7. I often feel completely exhausted, shattered and lacking in drive:
   Yes No

Category C:

1. I'm often in the best of moods and want to put all my ideas into action immediately:
   Yes No
2. Sometimes I'm so happy that I could sing and dance:
   Yes No
3. There are days when I can't take anything seriously:
   Yes No
4. From time to time I'm in such a good mood that I could party all night:
   Yes No

5. On a good day, I can entertain all those around me:
   Yes No
6. Often I'm in such high spirits that I'm wide awake at night and can't sleep:
   Yes No
7. I sometimes don't know when to stop, or only realize once I've gone too far:
   Yes No

The statements above will help you to determine how you cope with stress. I'm sure you're already aware that there are fundamentally different ways of dealing with tension.

If you have answered "yes" most frequently to the statements in A, read the following description:

Type A. You nearly always suffer from some degree of inner tension, even if you're not actually aware of it. Unfortunately, you rarely ever feel good or balanced. In addition, you are a type of person who isn't able to cope with stress. This means that situations involving a certain amount of stress are more problematic for you than for others. Rather than calming down, your levels of tension continue to rise until they reach a point where you fail to recognize that the other people have long since retreated. Though it may not seem that way on the outside, it may be that you tend to avoid contact with other people. I recommend that you let others get closer to you, and that you give them more of your time and attention.

If you've answered "yes" most frequently to the B questions, the following diagnosis applies to you:

Type B. You use all of your energy to guard against stress. This unconscious show of strength results in a lack of drive, apathy and even depression. Outwardly, you appear at one with yourself, aloof and unmoved. Inwardly, however, you are unbalanced because you feel you have to fend off anything that may cause you stress. Unfortunately, this means that you lose a lot of your liveliness, creativity and *joie de vivre*. In other words, you are inwardly paralyzed. Why don't you allow a bit of tension into your life? It could improve your quality of life.

If you belong to **type C**, read the following:

You are someone who thrives on stress: in fact, you can't do without it. As a rule, you know everybody and everything. Unfortunately, it's impossible to stop you when you're in full flow because you are so wound up that you pay little attention to others. You probably don't realize that you've gone too far and have perhaps even become a problem to others, whom you often regard merely as your audience. As a result, you are unable to build up close relationships. Even if you don't like to admit it, you get so excited that nobody can get close to you. You're the type of person who, above all, should consider relaxing from time to time.

The above statements may have helped you recognize that inner excitement often manifests itself as aimless activity, nervousness, anxiety, jumpiness and restlessness. This inner tension can easily be passed on to others. The problem is that restlessness leads to hectic activity and confusion around you. We must, however, differentiate between acute, temporary and chronic stress, since unsolved psychological conflicts from the past may be an issue here. It is perfectly normal for us to experience phases of increased stress; in fact, we can hardly avoid some degree of stress – we all have to make difficult decisions at some point in our lives. But if we are then unable to reduce our stress levels (by solving the conflict), increased inner

tension can lead to suppression at another level. Unsolved conflicts can ‘surface’ in aggressive behavior, for instance. The psychosomatic effects are plain to see: psychosomatic illnesses can be triggered by a chronic state of stress, or by stress levels that are too high. However, such pathological, organic changes can be avoided if we detect and eliminate the cause of the tension. Remember, high levels of tension and stress act as an impediment to our daily lives. You can be hampered by an increased drive, talking loudly and quickly, nervousness, absent−mindedness and forgetfulness. By the same token, the opposite state of affairs is no good to you either: reacting as if you are paralyzed is just an escape reflex. Try to find a middle road in your search for “well−being”, one that guarantees creativity and balance, and which also enables you to solve everyday problems and find inner peace. Once you have done this, the vegetative processes of your sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system will be in equilibrium.

Sympathetic Nervous System	**Organ**	**Parasympathetic Nervous System**
Activation, increase in heartbeat frequency	Heart	Calming, reduction of heartbeat frequency
Constriction of blood vessels, rise in blood pressure	Blood vessels	Dilation of blood vessels, reduced blood pressure
Relaxation of bladder muscles, emptying	Bladder	Activation of bladder muscles, closure of bladder
Constriction of bronchi	Bronchi	Dilation of bronchi
Constriction of pupils	Eyes	Dilation of pupils
Relaxation of bowel muscles	Bowel	Activation of bowel muscles, digestion
Activation of sweat glands	Sweat glands	Suppression of sweat glands
Activation and production of “stress hormones” that act as a warning to the body	Adrenal glands	Suppression of adrenal glands

The effect of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system on different bodily functions

PRACTICAL SECTION
Preface: Autogenic Training from a Scientific Point of View

Practitioners with years of experience behind them in studying and teaching relaxation methods know that autogenic training is the best way of introducing people to self−relaxation techniques. The short and simple exercises involved can be learned by everyone, making training an easy process. The explanatory approaches are based on switching the vegetative nervous system from the sympathetic tone (activation) to the parasympathetic tone (relaxation) during the exercises. By stabilizing the sympathicus/parasympathicus homeostasis, the general level of excitation is reduced with the result that we become more relaxed and at peace. This method of influencing our mental and physical relaxation works through autosuggestion and indirectly through positive feedback mechanisms. When you practice the exercises I will be describing for you here, redistribution takes place – for instance, the blood volume moves from the skin to the muscles. This leads to a rise in skin temperature of between 2 and 3 degrees Celsius, while, at the same time, body temperature is slightly lowered. Furthermore, our bodies need less oxygen (thus saving energy), and our heart rate slows down, while the volume of blood ejected increases in comparison to that of a 'control' person who is not practicing autogenic training. The patient focuses his or her whole concentration on the 'inner self', achieving a deep level of meditation (but one that is different from sleep). This has been repeatedly proven in our EEG and long−term EEG studies in which a stable frequency alpha rhythm was recorded while the theta band of brainwaves increased considerably. Patients become fitter after practicing autogenic training regularly; plus, reaction times are improved and errors at work happen less frequently compared with people who do not do this form of relaxation. Indeed, autogenic training is much more replenishing than simply resting or sleeping. In the so−called hypnoidal state of autogenic training, the practitioner increasingly turns towards intrinsic (inner) perceptions – this is also called "looking within oneself". Autogenic training represents a self−induced withdrawal of external stimulations, resulting in a feeling of general well−being and fitness. The effectiveness of autogenic training in treating certain ailments – for instance, in the case of moderate arterial blood pressure (hypotension) – has been proven.

If autogenic training is practiced regularly, the antihypertensive effect can last for a number of years, often enabling the patient to live his or her life without having to take medicine (thus avoiding the side effects that often come with them). Angina pectoris (coronary artery constriction) can also be positively influenced with autogenic training. Moreover, patients who master the technique of autogenic training have a considerably higher chance of surviving serious illness than non−practicing sufferers. This is why autogenic training achieves particularly good results in medical rehabilitation, such as in cases where someone has suffered a heart attack.
Anxiety, depression and exhaustion are considerably less likely to affect you if you learn and practice autogenic training.

Worldwide studies on the effects of autogenic training also reveal positive results with asthma patients. In addition, autogenic training can alleviate headaches, sleeping disorders, intestinal ailments and other illnesses that are caused by increased levels of stress, anxiety or tension. The first three basic exercises (heaviness, warmth, breathing) are especially helpful in promoting sleep. In our sleep laboratory, we were able to prove that this sleep−inducing method led to deeper sleep than normal. In the following sections, I'll describe the beneficial physical changes that can be achieved through methods of relaxation such as autogenic training.

Introductory Relaxation Exercises

Brain exercises: essential for positive thought and action

It is far more useful actually to do practical mental exercises than merely to read about the theory. To introduce you to methods of relaxation, I will describe two exercises that help to develop the right side of your brain. Exercising your little gray cells can help you become more creative: what's more, it's a fun way to relax:

1. Several times a week, you should draw a mental image in your mind, working in the words listed below. Read through the list twice, then close your eyes and try to create a mental image of the scene (not an 'action' memory from your last holiday, but a "fixed image"). Try to include all of the details from the list, but don't worry if you forget one of them. Pay particular attention to your mood and to the colors, shapes and smells that you picture.

Suggested list:

green meadow with poppies
tree in blossom in the sunshine
butterflies
birds singing
blue sky with clouds changing shape
a transparent splashing stream

If you enjoyed doing this exercise, spend 10 to 15 minutes a day imagining such a scene while lying in a comfortable position. Lie down on a carpet, perhaps with a cushion, and making sure that nobody can disturb you.

The following exercise helps you add movement to these "still pictures":

2. Create a brief film scene in your mind – one with a happy ending – using the following elements:

- a thunderstorm approaching from the distance
- rain falling into a sidewalk puddle
- a dog barking in the distance
- an automobile driving past
- a door creaking and slowly closing
- birds singing in a meadow of flowers in summer.

The object of this exercise is not to include all of the above details in your picture. Instead, you should train the mental capacity of your brain and your associative creative skills by incorporating the images or actions into your preferred method of relaxation. By integrating the list of pictures into autogenic training, for instance, you can further intensify your state of relaxation. Not only will you be conjuring up old memories, but new images also arise, intermingling with these memories. Incidentally, these exercises also strengthen your visual skills. Within a matter of months, you will notice that your ability to perceive things with your senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste) will have improved.

The Jacobsen Technique –

Promotion of Relaxation by Alternately Tensing and Releasing Muscle Groups

The Jacobsen Technique is a method of progressive muscle relaxation and involves the alternate tensing and releasing of muscle groups one at a time, until the whole body is relaxed. Not only does this technique relax the muscles, it also leads to an overall sensation of warmth and 'looseness'. Many people who are not receptive to any other kind of mental relaxation techniques can usually manage to 'tune in' to their bodies and achieve a state of general relaxation by concentrating on the difference between 'tensed' and 'released' muscle groups.

The Jacobsen Technique helps us recognize – and get rid of – the tension that arises when we unconsciously tighten our muscles in stress situations. One of its main aims is to loosen the most important muscle groups in the body, leading to a deep sense of relaxation. Before the muscles are consciously relaxed, they have to be slowly tensed: in the exercises I am about to describe, increase the tension in steps (counting slowly to four), then slowly release the muscles, concentrating on the difference between the two states. A third of the time should be spent gradually increasing the tension in the muscles and focusing on it. After this, the gradual relaxation process should last for the remaining two−thirds of the time. In other words, take around four or five seconds to tense your muscles gradually, and about ten seconds to relax them slowly. The brain 'stores' the different sensations of having tight or loose muscles, and after a few weeks of training you'll be able to notice when your body gets tense in everyday situations and take appropriate measures. In this way, these exercises lead to the positive sensitization of our consciousness. The exercises involved in the Jacobsen Technique should be practiced for a few minutes every day. You should ensure that nobody disturbs you since this would ruin the feeling of warmth and overall relaxation.

I'll describe a number of exercises from the Jacobsen Technique that can be practiced at home.

- First of all, lie on your back on the floor and make yourself comfortable. Close your eyes, focus your attention on your body and make sure that your breathing is slow, deep and regular.

- Concentrate on how your body feels and take note of every change.

- Make a fist with both hands, count slowly to four while you gradually increase the tension. Now release them over a period of five to ten seconds. Make sure that you are breathing slowly and regularly. This exercise should be repeated two or three times, then you proceed to the next one.

- Bend your elbows, pressing your lower arms against your upper arms. Gradually increase the tension counting to four, then release the muscles slowly and focus on the opposite sensation. This exercise should also be repeated two or three times.

- Stretch out your arms and press them against the ground. Slowly increase the tension and then relax. Take note of your breathing, which should be deep and regular.

- Breathe out and pull your stomach in so that it becomes hard. Increase the tension of your stomach muscles, then gradually release it, breathing slowly and regularly. This exercise should be repeated at least two or three times, because breathing exercises are an essential component of relaxation.

- Tense your bottom. Press your legs to the ground. Now increase the tension, counting to four, then release the muscles. Repeat this exercise twice.

- Now concentrate on breathing slowly and regularly without tensing your muscles at all. Enjoy the sensation of overall relaxation for 15 seconds or so. Then, as in autogenic training, take a sharp, deep breath, suddenly tense your arms and release them again. Remain lying on the floor with your eyes closed for a few seconds. You have now finished the exercises.

If you practice these exercises for your arms, stomach, bottom and most importantly for your breathing every day, you will train yourself to become more aware of your body, enabling you to get rid of tension that arises in other situations over the day.

The general loosening of muscles together with the development of respiratory rhythm are essential factors in relaxation. They are not only important in the Jacobsen Technique – they also form the basis of most other relaxation exercises and are essential in achieving a total state of well−being.

The Importance of Breathing in All Relaxation Techniques

Our breathing reflects our mind−body relationship

Put simply, when we inhale we take in oxygen from the air, which provides us with energy. When we exhale, we release carbon dioxide. It is essential that both of these gases are in a state of equilibrium in our bodies. If the balance between the two is disturbed, we suffer from a variety of symptoms including increased tension and nervousness, even leading to hyperventilation. Normally, breathing occurs unconsciously – we automatically take in the amount of oxygen we need to remain healthy. Problems arise if we have too little oxygen in our blood. In stressful situations, many people tend not to breath deeply and regularly, but instead take shallow, irregular breaths. Correct breathing is balanced and deep, and involves the abdomen. Breathing always becomes slower, more regular and rhythmic when we relax our muscles, are asleep, or are practicing autogenic training. Our body no longer needs to do as much “work” and starts to feel calm and relaxed. Broadly speaking, relaxed respiration – that is, abdominal breathing – can be equated with the deep, general relaxation of the whole body.

One important thing to be aware of when practicing relaxation exercises is the movements in the chest and abdominal area that occur when we breathe. Don’t try to slow down your breathing rate by holding your breath, pressing or breathing more deeply, however. Unfortunately, we have all experienced situations where our breathing changes in times of excitement or stress. Our breathing becomes shallow and rushed, we find ourselves gasping for air, or sighing deeply and exhaling heavily. I should emphasize that these are absolutely normal reactions to stress. But if they occur too frequently, this shallow form of breathing can start to become a habit and may eventually result in hyperventilation. When this happens, our body expels too much carbon dioxide, which leads to an imbalance. Hyperventilation, in turn,

can cause a number of symptoms: for instance, parts of the body can become numb, we might experience tingling feelings, dizziness or faintness. These symptoms actually increase our levels of stress, which in turn leads to more hyperventilation, and so on, until a vicious circle arises. Since the process is largely unconscious, the sufferer can do little to prevent it from happening. Immediate relief can be gained by breathing in and out of a paper bag, thus reducing the amount of oxygen taken into the lungs. The best solution from a medical point of view, however, is to ‘learn’ normal respiration via relaxation techniques.

Stress

Anxiety

Tension

Pressure to do well

Excessive demands

Loneliness

Agitation

Conflicts

For instance,

Headache, dizziness
Sleep disorders

Swallowing difficulties

Breathing difficulties
Racing heartbeat, pain in the heart

Tenseness

Stomach ache
Loss of appetite
Sensation of fullness
Constipation

Control center for emotions and moods

Control center for organ functions
(vegetative center)

Feedback and Feedforward!
Biofeedback: Positive Consciousness Can Be Trained – Feedforward!

Biofeedback uses small sensors to pick up, amplify and feed back a range of bodily 'signals' such as muscle tension, heart rate, breathing, skin temperature, and so on, enabling us to record any changes that may occur (information is conveyed by way of visible or audible signals). The technique lets you influence physiological reactions that usually take place unconsciously and automatically. For instance, information regarding your pulse is amplified using a sound and light signal and fed back to you so that you become aware of how your pulse varies – and can be influenced. This, in turn, can help to combat racing pulse phobia (hyperkinetic heart syndrome). Negative physiological phenomena (in this case, anxiety−induced increased reaction of the heart) can be reduced or even eradicated by practicing biofeedback. One's pulse can be slowed more effectively through biofeedback than by simply concentrating on the pulse rate.

Biofeedback instruments are also effective in relaxation exercises such as autogenic training (for instance, when practicing 'heaviness' using EMG feedback), temperature exercises (using temperature feedback) or the Jacobsen Technique of muscle relaxation. The actual sound of the feedback signal (pleasant sound sequences) also helps users relax, thus increasing the overall effect of relaxation.

Biofeedback equipment should be thought of as a kind of external nervous system, one that enables you to become aware of the difference between tensed and relaxed muscles. The signal sent from the biofeedback machine can positively influence body and mind. Biofeedback helps treat migraines, muscular tension, post−traumatic neck syndrome, lumbar vertebrae syndrome and high blood pressure. It is important to realize that this treatment in no way makes you dependent on a machine. The process simply assists you while you practice your exercises. The monitoring equipment helps you find the shortest route to mental and physical balance. As soon as you learn to 'read' your body, it becomes more easily controllable. Respiration feedback is an exception to the rule: patients do not actively learn a different breathing rhythm; instead, they are helped to become aware of the *act* of inhaling and exhaling, emphasized by light and sound signals (which in turn promote deep relaxation). Respiration feedback is only used 'passively' to achieve normal breathing.

The most exciting aspect about biofeedback is that, by using equipment to monitor and display brainwaves, we can learn how to influence them. For instance, think of a peaceful scene – perhaps a beach sunset. These pleasant thoughts alter your brainwaves, and biofeedback equipment allows you to register the changes by transforming them into sounds. Once the patient has come to grips with how biofeedback techniques work, the method becomes more effective than any theoretical approach: the patient learns how to take control of their own inner state. Indeed, the equipment *alone* cannot change anything. It's up to the patient to become actively involved in the search for relaxation. And it needs to be practiced daily to achieve a lasting effect. In the case of post−traumatic neck syndrome and lumbar vertebrae syndrome, you'll notice that success arrives quite quickly. My experience has shown that people who are initially rather uncomfortable with suggestive or purely meditative mental processes are able to relax quickly and effectively using biofeedback.

The learning process can be divided into two steps:
First of all, the equipment helps patients to appreciate how bodily functions change. For many people, this will be something of a revelation; thereafter they will be able to take a positive role in achieving a state of relaxation.

After having used the biofeedback equipment to observe these physiological changes, most patients learn how to alter their bodily functions without the use of the machine after just a few weeks of daily practice. The mental state attained is similar to that experienced in other meditation exercises: namely, inner harmony and calmness involving pleasant images such as a meadow, the sea, woods, and so on.

The patient never becomes dependent on the acoustic or optical feedback from the machine. All the equipment does is monitor your state of consciousness and allow you to regulate it. This learnable form of self−control works in almost all cases, resulting in the formation of new emotional perceptions (called “relaxation reactions”). These reactions are stored in the brain and lead to lasting relaxation and weaker “stress reactions” throughout the day.

Put simply, learning through biofeedback takes advantage of the fact that information flows through our nervous systems producing patterns – which we can influence positively. Storage of ‘positive’ memory patterns in the brain is carried out by electrical impulses and so−called ‘memory molecules’. We can therefore appreciate how the feedback of voluntary muscular tension during biofeedback sessions enables paralytic patients, such as those who have suffered from a stroke, to regain the use of their muscles in the affected area more effectively than when the same exercises are practiced without employing the specialist equipment.

Biofeedback can be used in both directions – to activate muscle groups (muscle−building) or to relax muscles (loosening muscles and relaxation).
The classic learning process of biofeedback can be divided into the following steps:

1. First, vegetative functions are displayed. You become aware of various bodily functions through sounds and light signals.
2. It may take a number of sessions before you manage to alter your body’s reactions in a certain direction, and engrave the memory of it on your brain.
3. A lasting change in behavior, also called ‘shaping’, represents a positive, lasting program in our brain (for instance, “If I want, I can switch off and feel the muscles in my arms and legs relax”).

Biofeedback can be used an as aid to condition autonomous regulatory circuits. It leads to rapid success and leaves behind lasting memory traces (so−called “feedforward”).

What are the drawbacks?

Biofeedback is not suitable for anyone who is unwilling to learn new processes and practice these regularly over a number of months. Indeed, being able to understand the learning processes needed to achieve the goal is a prerequisite if one is to get any benefit. Just to reiterate, contrary to popular belief biofeedback does *not* mean that the patient becomes dependent on a machine. Rather, patients are given the opportunity to improve their self−esteem through self−control. The patient always remains at the center of the technique. Learnable self−control is not only oriented towards “reprogramable” psychosomatic disorders but also emphasizes putting ourselves in a position to become acquainted with new programs in the brain, in order to influence them positively. The electronic equipment used in the biofeedback sessions should be viewed as highly efficient temporary crutches, ones that will no longer be needed once we have “learned to walk”, so to speak. This advanced stage in the feedback process should really be called “feedforward”, since we will be applying feedback to

influence the future course of our lives positively. How we deal with things and how we behave towards and communicate with others can be read from the responses we gain using feedback (you might like to think of it as a mirror held in front of us). From a therapeutic point of view, I consider biofeedback to be a method that allows patients to become aware of their own behavioral and reaction patterns on a psychosomatic level, with or without the use of monitoring equipment. Since it is your state of mind that makes your surroundings seem either exciting or dull, it's time you took it into your own hands.

Note:
Biofeedback equipment emphasizes your own psychosomatic processes; these can be changed in a positive direction.

Explanation of the table on the following page:
State−of−consciousness profiles at various stages of arousal (increasing from top to bottom); one arrow signifies weak change; two arrows represent strong change; the omission of an arrow means that no change has occurred; sp. = spindle activity; an EEG pattern in REM sleep and the falling−asleep phase (taken from Ebert, 1986, Table 22).

Different States of Consciousness and their Effects on the Mind and Body

State of Function	Arousal	EEG	Vegetative Tone			Motorial Tone	Alertness Objectives	State of Affection
			HF	AF	En.verbr.			
Deep sleep	lapsed	delta, theta				lowered	none	none
REM sleep	dreams	theta, sp.				atonia	dream content	variable
Relaxed awake state	awake	alpha, beta	−	−	basal metabolic rate	resting tone	spontaneously available	calm
AT/hypnosis	awake	alpha			basal metabolic rate	atonia	suggestion	calm
Meditation	awake	alpha				atonia?	voluntarily available	indifferent calm
Tensed awake state	awake	beta				increased	outside world	variable
Stress reaction	wide awake	beta				highly increased	outside world	excited

Inner Balance and Higher Quality of Life Through Autogenic Training

… a clear vision of the future

Leading a balanced life does not mean having to see the world through rose−tinted glasses. You can only practice relaxation techniques that involve positive thinking, feeling and acting successfully if you decide to practice regularly. A good technique to learn is autogenic (= self−created) training.

One argument that I often come up against is: “I don’t have the time to practice. I’m at a low ebb when I get home from work and can’t motivate myself to do anything.” All I can say to that is when you get home from work and fall exhausted into an armchair, you only *think* that you are relaxing. In the following, I’ll show you how specific methods of relaxation lead to more effective regeneration than merely resting. When you practice autogenic training, you are doing yourself a favor. Dr. Johannes Schulz, who developed autogenic training out of his experience with hypnosis at the turn of the century, was well aware of the benefits to be had from the technique. Since its introduction, autogenic training has been practiced by people from all walks of life, including athletes, managers, overtaxed housewives or househusbands and stressed schoolchildren. The exercises involved in autogenic training are completely free of religious or other philosophical bodies of thought. It is usually sufficient to practice individual exercises for about 15 minutes a day. The perceptible psychovegetative changes (as described in the theoretical section above) experienced while carrying out the exercises enable us to learn to improve our awareness of our bodies. We then become aware of positive changes (for instance, feeling muscles tense, and so on). I’ll describe the advanced exercises later. These include image visualization during relaxation and can even improve your insight into unconscious psychosomatic processes.

Exercises:

General introduction: Winding down

Lie in a relaxed state on the floor, preferably on your back, with your arms resting beside your body and your legs stretched out. Do not fold your arms or cross your legs. For the first few seconds, just focus on relaxing and winding down. Close your eyes. This mental “resting tone” as Dr. Schulz called it is an absolute ‘must’ before you can proceed to practice each of the other exercises for two or three minutes. After you have reached the resting tone, let your thoughts proceed to the first exercise.

Exercise 1: Inducing Heaviness; your arms and legs feel very heavy.

Just concentrate on how heavy your arms and legs feel (by which I don’t mean the physical weight of your arms and legs; the brain is not able to differentiate between heaviness and relaxation so that in reality, when you concentrate on heaviness, your arm and leg muscles, as well as other muscle groups in the body, become extremely relaxed and loose). It may be best to begin by just concentrating on the heaviness of your arms for the first few days. Think to yourself over and over again how pleasantly loose and heavy your arm muscles feel. If you feel at ease with this, after one or two minutes you can proceed to the heaviness in your legs. The aim of this exercise is to create a pleasant state of relaxation affecting the muscles in your whole body. Concentrating on the heaviness of your arms and legs requires a feeling of general peacefulness in your brain, which means other vegetative regulatory circuits also

“switch” to relaxation mode, just as they do in the falling asleep phase. For the first 14 days, you should only practice experiencing the feeling of heaviness in your arms and legs for a couple of minutes. After this, you should briefly ‘undo’ or ‘cancel’ the effect by briefly flexing your arms and legs, breathing deeply and opening your eyes. Each exercise should be ended in this way to enable your brain to recall the acts of “being awake” and “being refreshed” into your consciousness (similar to stretching in the morning when you get up). From week to week you can add another exercise to your autogenic training program, resulting in an overall duration of 15 to 20 minutes for all six exercises. Even in the first week, when concentrating on heaviness you’ll experience a feeling of general relaxation. Although your mind may wander at the beginning, you’ll soon notice that your other thoughts become increasingly insignificant, so that you really can focus on the feelings in your arms and legs.

Exercise 2: Inducing Warmth; the feeling of warmth in your arms and legs.

After practicing the first exercise for just a couple of weeks, many people feel a pleasant warm feeling in their arms and legs. This sensation is proof that your arms and legs are beginning to relax and that you are gradually attaining a state of deep relaxation. From a medical point of view this sensation means that you are experiencing “generalization”, which is promoted by general muscle relaxation and which leads automatically to increased blood flow. A feeling of warmth arises whenever the muscles are loose and relaxed. Concentrate for a few minutes on the feeling of warmth in your arms and legs. Incidentally, you can see the results of the exercise using a thermometer on your arms and legs. Tests have revealed that after one to two weeks of practicing this exercise every day, the surface temperature of the skin increases by 1 to 2 degrees Celsius. The point of the exercise is not to achieve an increase in skin temperature, however, but rather to develop a sensation of overall deep relaxation. It usually only takes around one or two weeks for the brain to recognize and ‘retrieve’ this exercise. After completing the first two exercises, which create a state of general relaxation, we can now proceed to one of the most important exercises – breathing.

Exercise 3: Breathing Practice: concentrating on breathing calmly and regularly; reaching a state of deep relaxation.

As with the previous two exercises this exercise is also about focusing on your regular breathing rhythm rather than actually trying actively to influence it. The exercise invites you to abandon yourself to your own breathing, usually abdominal breathing, which occurs when we are feeling relaxed (for instance, in the phase before we fall asleep). In general, we can say that the more at peace we feel, the slower our breathing automatically becomes. Over the years I have been teaching autogenic training, I continue to notice that these first three exercises alone produce deep relaxation, and this, of course, influences the whole body systematically. It is easy to see why these first three exercises are very popular with people who suffer from insomnia. Sometimes these exercises are also combined with visualization – the use of images to improve the falling asleep phase – or other positive motivation formulas. After having practiced the first three exercises, you may like to add one of the visualization images described in this book. In my experience, the two aspects complement each other very well.

Exercise 4: Heart Practice; the pulse beats calmly and regularly.

The heart function (cardiac beats and ejection) is also a typical psychovegetative−controlled bodily function. In other words, both physical and psychological occurrences over the day

can influence the heart rate. The aim of this exercise is to regenerate the natural harmonization of the pulse. Focus on your pulse, preferably at your wrist or finger and concentrate on the pleasant pulsating feeling. It is important to feel the pulse on your hand or another peripheral part of the body, rather than at your neck or in the area of the heart itself. This is because many people associate a feeling of “fear” with these areas (for instance, near the common carotid artery). Should you experience such anxiety and are reminded of a frightening situation, tell yourself that the beauty with autogenic training is that concentration on calmness alone can lead to the harmonization of your heart rhythm.

Exercise 5: The Solar Plexus; my body is flowingly warm, I feel at peace and relaxed.

The solar plexus is part of the autonomous nervous system, which regulates the function of the abdominal organs. Concentrating on the solar plexus leads to a feeling of warmth, or rather increased blood flow and relaxation of the abdominal muscles. The whole lower abdomen and the functions of the nerve plexus are balanced. This exercise leads to an overall relaxation of the abdomen, normalization of the gastrointestinal functions, the digestive system, the bladder, and so on. This fifth exercise of autogenic training leads to the deepest hypnotic state and causes the whole mind and body to relax. It is useful to think of the sentence “My solar plexus is flowingly warm” while visualizing images. Imagine you are lying on the patio in the sun or in the bath in order to feel the sensation of warmth. The formula involves the vegetative nerve plexus of the abdominal region – calming and at the same time optimizing its functions. By imagining a pleasant feeling of warmth in the abdominal area, the abdominal muscles do indeed become relaxed, functions are regularized and harmonized, and it has been proven that the vegetative regulatory circuits (including hormonal regulations) are improved by the exercise. We are then able to understand why it is that people who suffer from abdominal problems (such as an irritable bowel syndrome, gastritis, nervous intestinal complaints) gain especial relief from practicing these abdominal exercises. If you have not yet begun to visualize in the breathing exercise, you could do so now. Think of a pleasant image – such as lying in a meadow – to extend the pleasant sensation of deep relaxation. This slight variation of autogenic training has been used successfully for many years by participants in my relaxation courses. It leads to even deeper relaxation and a feeling of well−being.

Please note: If you practice the abdominal exercises before going to sleep, you will sink into a deeper sleep.

Exercise 6: Head Practice; my forehead is pleasantly cool.

After the first five exercises have helped you achieve a general feeling of relaxation, the sixth and final exercise makes your thoughts travel “further up” to your forehead. It involves the sensation of your forehead gradually feeling cooler. This is also achieved by suggestion, by repeating the sentence “My forehead is pleasantly cool” until there is less blood flow in the head area. Although this may sound strange to you initially, the reason for it is easily explained. Relaxation and improved blood circulation in the whole body is experienced as a pleasant feeling, but the head area should be imagined as being cooler since increased blood flow in this area awakens negative feelings. It’s not without reason that we use the phrase “to keep a cool head”. This exercise should not be practiced before going to bed, since it will probably make you feel more awake than before.

If used correctly, autogenic training can lead to overall regeneration, even after only a few weeks of practice. From the above information, I’m sure that you’re now well aware of the

fact that these simple but effective exercises can be used successfully to combat general psychosomatic illnesses and disorders. Once you have repeated the exercises on a regular basis, you will find that you have mastered the technique. If you practice other methods of relaxation, you'll find that they are all based on the fundamental aspects of autogenic training.

Advanced Autogenic Training

Based on ancient relaxation techniques originating in the Far East, the meditative exercises involved in advanced autogenic training are similar to those used in meditative visualization and imagery. Although standard autogenic training can help you to relax deeply and feel at one with yourself practicing the advanced version can offer you an even wider perspective. It represents an extension of autogenic training that strengthens your self−knowledge and improves your ability to experience and focus on things. Unconscious aspects of our consciousness can be brought to light, which is why many psychotherapists include this form of deep relaxation in their psychotherapeutic sessions. The aim of the exercises below is to give students new vitality and the courage to cope with problems in life. The advanced program represents a process of self−discovery. Moreover, advanced autogenic training also helps strengthen one's self−confidence, and encourages positive thinking and acting. Before you can turn to this more meditative form of autogenic training, however, you should first spend around six months practicing the standard formulas every day.

Level 1:
Practice the basic program of autogenic training. Then we can begin with the first advanced step, in which a uniform color should appear before your mind's eye. The colors you imagine may vary, but after a few weeks practice you'll have found your own "color". The main aim of this exercise is to experience the intensity of the colors and afterwards to make an emotional, personal interpretation of them.

Level 2:
In this level, the student aims to see a dynamic multitude of colors before the mind's eye. Imagining emotionally charged colors and patterns of movement gives you a better insight into your own range of moods and personal mobility. You'll soon realize that the patterns of the colors you visualize depend on your current mood or 'phase' of life.

Level 3:
In addition to colors, simple shapes may now occur, which you should visualize. Try to be as aware of them as you can so that you can interpret them afterwards. They will be an extension to your earlier vivid colors, with additional borderlines such as circles, rings, lines, patterns, and so on. These shapes can shed light on such things as personal decisions you need to make.

Level 4:
Now you should focus on objects in your mind's eye. These can be everyday items, ornaments, symbolic objects, mandalas, faces or masks that appear against a background. Before embarking on this exercise, you should first decide which shape you would like to see in your mind's eye. The objects visualized in a state of relaxation can shed light on the brain's unconscious processing of experiences. Decision−making processes can also be simplified insofar as unconscious objectives can be improved on by changing objects you have interpreted. As in dreams, both realistic and unrealistic movements can arise in this fourth level (which can be thought of as a kind of a daydream or lucid dream). This level forms the link to dream−like or unconscious elements.

Level 5:
The aim of this level is to encourage images of landscapes and other scenarios to appear. 'Inside' and 'outside' scenes become interchangeable. Memories stored in the unconscious play an increasingly important role at this stage. Like in an accessible dream, images and

scenes appear from your unconsciousness, making up a kind of film in which you are the director.

Level 6:
This level, which enables you to visualize film−like sequences, is an intensification of level 5. Short scenes – which may include dynamic elements from the past – are played out. Over the course of time you may be able to practice changing from the role of passive observer to that of active participant; this enables you to run through solutions to problems (ensuring you retain a feeling of relaxation and well−being). It represents a highly interesting step in which unconscious and conscious controlling elements of our mind are linked to one another.

Step 7:
Self−participation is the maxim of this level, which involves you in experiencing a colorful scenario. The content of scenes may vary, and can be actively influenced by you. In other words, you become actively involved in the 'plot'. Psychotherapeutic aspects of the subconsciousness can be dealt with in this step.

Please note: The significance of individual scenes can be interpreted alone or with a therapist after completion of the exercise.

These seven levels intervene in each another. In the course of a few months, you'll be able to choose whether your form of daily relaxation is to be passive visualization or whether you want to play through solutions to problems in a state of deep relaxation. Advanced autogenic training must, however, always be preceded by intensive practice of the standard exercises. To conclude, not only is autogenic training a form of quick, deep relaxation – it can also offer you an insight into the workings of your unconscious.

Making Use of Creativity Through Relaxation

Creativity means throwing caution and prejudices to the wind and becoming receptive to new ideas. To be able to do this, however, you first have to feel at one with yourself and be unconstrained by stress factors. Since it's rather difficult in our everyday lives to make sense of all our jumbled ideas – something that is essential for creativity – I'd like to lay down some guidelines to help you order your thoughts. Creativity does not simply mean being different or being against something. It means freeing yourself from an inner fixation on certain rules, and questioning rules you've always assumed to be golden. Extricating yourself from the chaos of your life means:

- freeing yourself from your old thought patterns. Rethink your thought patterns, even those you consider to be proven, and ask yourself if you could assess things in any other way (incidentally, it's not imperative to arrive at a different outcome, but it might happen).
- being receptive to new information that you may have failed to notice in the past. Ask yourself in certain situations whether you have taken all of the relevant information into consideration.
- being open to surprises and not immediately rejecting them. New and unusual things that do not immediately fit into a certain box need not necessarily be bad.
- being open to new contexts. Try seeing things from another person's perspective for a change.

- living for the present (things from the past are unconsciously and consciously stored in the brain anyway). Don’t waste time thinking about what could be or what should be. Orientate yourself around the ‘now’.
- the most important point is to concentrate on processes and not just on results. Take more time to think about how certain results came about in order to use your energy more positively and in a stress−free manner.

Chinese Medicine, Tai Chi and More – Paths to ‘Inner Flow’

The Chinese can help us visualize

Tai chi – a tradition developed in ancient China – can help you relax more effectively. Although this facet of Chinese medicine only established itself as a standard therapy in the West at the beginning of the 1980s, it has been practiced in one form or another in China for thousands of years. The different aims and varieties of tai chi are considerable. Although the philosophical or religious approaches may vary, however, they all have one thing in common: they are all based on the premise that health and calmness lie at the origin of the development of individual skills. Indeed, this also corresponds to Western thought, since what we think of as ‘our’ concept of the psychosomatic unity of the body, mind and soul was in fact incorporated into Chinese medicine and thought many years ago. Many Chinese methods of relaxation make use of physical movement and rhythm to harmonize feelings and perceptions. In other words, they go beyond simply theoretical stages, enabling us to relate our ‘inner scenes’ to a corresponding form of movement. Tai chi has its origin in a structured system of exercises containing a series of relaxed and graceful movements, the beginnings of which originated in cult dances around 2500 B.C., and which were subsequently ‘prescribed’ to the people. Indeed, over the course of time, these ‘healing’ dances developed into key components of Chinese medicine. Since these dances were also practiced by soldiers and warriors, it is easy to understand that various martial art techniques, such as shadow boxing and kung fu, originated too from this form of Chinese medicine. Meditative breathing exercises, which also stem from this early phase, form the basis of nearly all current relaxation techniques, and play a leading role in both Chinese and western ways of thought. The Taoists even developed the art of breathing, “mei kung” (which literally means ‘inner effectiveness’), from these early breathing exercises. The various individual techniques were then incorporated into Zen Buddhism at around 500 A.D. Physical control, speed, and concentration on inner calmness have always played a decisive role throughout the history of these techniques. The exercises represent a kind of ‘outer school’, where the ‘inner school’ is the psychological grounding that aims to help us retain our inner energy. Other disciplines draw on this distinction. For instance, karate exercises are just one Japanese example of ‘outer boxing’.

The core of Chinese medicine is often implemented as a paradigm into ‘modern’ relaxation techniques that depend on the development of self−control. These techniques consist of mental training on a spiritual level, and practical exercises involving a series of movements. The optimal use of one’s own energy potential always remains in the fore. I’m sure you are aware that this Chinese approach can easily be applied to situations in western life, since a balanced flow of energy can only be achieved through inner peace and calmness (concentrated relaxation, rather than passive inactivity). People who have gained a sense of self−awareness throughout the day – by repeating short mental and physical relaxation exercises, for instance – also find that their sleep is much more regenerative than those who do not practice such exercises. If you have decided, on the other hand, to use calmness and visualization as a means of helping you fall asleep, and want to integrate them into short, daily relaxation phases, it is advisable to take note of the following advice:

Visualization Exercises and Other Techniques Leading to Inner Calm

- Before concentrating on visualization, first take some time to unwind, for example by concentrating on calm and regular breathing. Once you have focused on your bodily signals for a few minutes, you can turn to and enjoy the visualized image in your 'mind's eye'.

- You may find it beneficial to prepare your relaxation room before you begin. If you arrive home from work and want to relax for 10−20 minutes before embarking on another activity, this act of "looking within yourself" should be made decisive in your mind. This may mean dimming the lights, taking the phone off the hook or putting up a "Please do not disturb" sign.

- Each relaxation exercise and visualization should be carried out in a basic relaxed position. As described in the section on autogenic training, this is likely to be the lying down position, but you may prefer another relaxed posture. Simply ensure that a minimum number of muscle groups in your body are required to hold the resting position. For this reason, it's best to lie with your back on the floor, possibly on a blanket, your arms resting loosely beside you and your legs slightly apart. If you prefer the sitting position, ensure that your bottom is positioned towards the back of the chair, in order to place the spine in a vertical position, preventing the use of most muscle groups. Your legs should be together, in a vertical position; your arms should be hanging loosely. In what follows, I'll give you an example of a text you can use to relax. Either read it slowly, record it onto a cassette or imprint it in your memory. The text is the result of many years of helping others to relax, and may also enable you to practice relaxation exercises followed by visualization:

"Once again, I would like to take the time to make myself comfortable and relax and, while I may be thinking how nice it is to relax completely, I gradually feel the changes in my body, the feeling that I'm slowly beginning to relax. I can feel how my arms and legs begin to relax and rest heavily on the blanket. My breathing is calm and regular and, like the regular movement of a wave on the ocean, I can gradually deepen the feeling of relaxation. I can feel a slow, increasing inner calmness, which continues to develop in harmony with my breathing. My mind is becoming calmer and clearer, and the thoughts and images that now appear disappear again as quickly as they came. Like the calm surf of the sea, I become more and more calm and relaxed. When I exhale I sense how completely I can let go. My concentration is centered on my whole body; I feel how it becomes more and more relaxed. It's almost automatic. I can enjoy the feeling of letting go, being free, relaxed; the rhythm of my breathing is like the movement of the sea that automatically deepens my relaxation. I feel content, secure and composed, as if I were lying on soft grass in a forest clearing, feeling secure, warm and safe."

This text should help you relax for a few minutes before enabling you to proceed to visualization when you can strengthen the feeling of relaxation. This type of visualization can be improved even further by playing soft, gentle sounds of the sea in the background.

Visualization Helps You Let Go

A Journey to the Depths of the Brain

Visualization techniques and relaxation go hand in hand. When used correctly they are an effective form of autotherapy. Albert Schweitzer, the doctor and Nobel prizewinner, once stated: “All we doctors do is support and encourage the ‘inner doctor’. The healing process is just autotherapy.” I believe that we can profit from this statement. Indeed, through visualization we can use our creative mind to improve our inner motivation, enabling us to live in a more self−aware fashion, which in turn could improve our quality of life. In so doing, we use our inner capabilities to achieve a state of consciousness that not only promotes relaxation, but that can also have a healing influence. Visualization helps order the chaos in our minds; it sorts out the multitude of images and impressions in the ‘cinema’ in our heads.

Visualization can be thought of as a kind of lucid dreaming. Visualization and daydreaming are closely related and both are ideal for integrating into relaxation techniques. You’ve already learned that different levels of consciousness vary according to our state of wakefulness. When we are in a deep relaxed state, we are to all extents and purposes in a trance – a limited state of consciousness that allows dreams to occur. Dreams are fascinating things that medical neurophysiological principles are not able to explain fully. Why not, therefore, try to clarify your own night−time dreams in order to become better acquainted with them on a conscious level. Night−time dreams can be compared to a film running inside our minds, over which we have little control. Visualization, a form of daydreaming, helps us intervene while we are ‘on−line’, so to speak. We are not interested now in interpreting dreams *after* they have occurred at night (actually, their meaningfulness is rather dubious, since we tend to distort their content when awake). Our intention is rather to experience visualization directly – as in a lucid dream. These are states of consciousness in which we are aware of the fact that we are dreaming or visualizing. Nearly all of us can learn to have lucid dreams. Many of us will already have experienced conscious and controllable dreams; in fact, it is a common phenomenon. For instance, before falling asleep we may find ourselves concentrating on a subject that we subsequently dream about. In other words, by thinking of a pleasant image such as lying on a beach before we fall asleep, we can influence the contents of our fantasies and dreams. The paths to our dream world are neither spatially nor temporally determined; they simply link our experiences to a fantasy world where time and space seem to be endless. When we are awake, we are restricted by our responsibilities and social contracts. When we dream, however, we can cross these boundaries easily. Of course, it’s handy and indeed desirable to have physical and psychological limitations set on us throughout the day, otherwise we wouldn’t be able to adjust to many situations. But these limits have no place in visualization.

The ability to cross mental boundaries is an important aspect of our mind with regard to self−healing. For instance, in the concentration camps of the Second World War, many inmates not only dreamed about awful occurrences, but also of beaches, warmth and well−being, even after having experienced the most dreadful things during the day. The mind seemed to want to invoke an autotherapeutic process in the form of dreams or visualization. Some people who went through such catastrophic events report that such dreaming and visualization episodes helped them survive.

Since ‘daytime visualization’ is a weakened form of lucid night dreaming, I’ll begin by describing the latter phenomenon.

Use Your Day−Time and Night−Time Dreaming Periods to Relax
Learning to Control Your Dreams Using Trance

It is possible to 'wake up' in the middle of a dream. It is also possible to learn how to actively influence the contents of your dreams. The quality of your consciousness is then lucid (clear), and similar to the state of being awake. If you manage to attain this state, you will feel mentally completely awake, but at the same time you'll know that you're still dreaming. You'll be able to experience your dream world perfectly and realistically, using all of your normal sensory impressions. What is happening here is that the borderline between fantasy and reality has been crossed – something that has been a human desire for hundreds of years. Popular attempts made in recent decades to achieve a state of lucidity using synthetic drugs just show how deep−rooted this urge is to delve into the depths of our consciousness. Hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD are also purported to widen one's consciousness. Seen from a medical point of view, however, this belief is mistaken. Changing your state of consciousness through external influences such as drugs is rather like fleeing from reality; think of it as an artificial filter imposed from outside that can make us addicted and which may even be physically harmful. Lucid dreaming on the other hand makes use of the autotherapeutic abilities of the brain. Personally, I regard the distortion of daily perception through psychedelic drugs to be dangerous. Using such drugs can lead to psychoses and leave one with permanent hallucinations. In many ways this is similar to the symptoms experienced in schizophrenic psychoses in which sensory deceptions and split consciousness frequently occur. These self−induced conditions in no way represent an extension of the mind. Once inside the body, synthetic poisons can cause mental trauma and a feeling of blockage (not to mention a long list of other medical risks). It is much better to tap into your *own* powers to investigate states of consciousness by learning to have lucid dreams.

Please note:
In the course of our everyday lives we need limitations placed on our perception so that our consciousness can work optimally and positively without becoming cluttered with unimportant impressions.

At night or during relaxation exercises things are different. During visualization or lucid dreaming, these limits are removed, allowing us to expand our brains.

To understand how these skills can be learned, let us recall what we already know about psychophysiological matters. Modern neuroscience is able to comprehend these states of consciousness from what it knows about the creative abilities of the brain. A lucid space represents a highly active phase of REM sleep. In the following section, I'll summarize the typical features of normal dreaming:

Dreamlands:

- The functional processes of the brain are just as active when we dream as when we are awake. Indeed, in a dream we see things as if we were awake. Dream phases (REM sleep) occur cyclically at night every 60−90 minutes.

- Most dreams are primarily influenced by the sensory impression of sight. The other senses may also come into play, however, although in a less pronounced manner than when we are awake. The order in which our senses are used when controlling fantasies and dreaming are: 70% though visionary impressions; 20% through aural impressions; followed by impressions gained through the sense of touch, temperature, smell and taste.

- We probably forget dreams quickly because they are rarely stored consciously in the brain. This is useful because it allows us to ‘clean up’ the chaos of our feelings.

- There are clear indications that a biochemical substance (acetylculin) is formed as a neurotransmitter when we dream and visualize.

Please note:
Fantasy, dreaming and trance−like states are closely related to each other. Lucid dreaming and targeted visualization are advanced forms of heightened inner perception. They can best be equated with an expansion of the consciousness, and can also be used as visualization techniques over the course of the day.

Basic Rules for Lucid Dreaming at Night

(modified according to Dr. Tholey's Method)

If you take the following points to heart, you will realize after a short while – possibly after just a few weeks – that your dreams have become more 'conscious' and that you are more likely to remember their content. You will also be able to visualize more efficiently during the day when you practice your relaxation techniques.

In addition, you will be able to dream lucidly, allowing you to become acquainted with new things and run through solutions to problems in your mind. To achieve this, you first need to relax deeply, only then moving on to visualization. The following procedure gives you some guidance:

- During the day, ask yourself repeatedly whether you are awake or whether you are dreaming. Take a couple of minutes every day to do this. Most of the time you'll decide that you are wide awake. But sometimes you may not be as awake as you might suppose. The aim of this exercise is to develop a critical attitude towards reality that will be transferred to the dream state.

- Although you might decide you are awake, at the same time, try to think that this same state could also be a dream and include all the physical sensations involved in dreams.

- Ask yourself whether any memories spring to mind, possibly in the context of events that have occurred in the past.

- Then try to insert such short processes (brief states of trance) at times of the day when you would typically be 'day'−dreaming. These might be situations involving strong emotions or big surprises. You can also intensify all relaxation techniques by asking yourself "Am I dreaming or am I awake. Am I visualizing?".

- Check to see if subjects that recur in your night−time dreams actually occur during the day. If you find it difficult to recall your dreams, try to train your memory using other relaxation techniques such as autogenic training, breathing relaxation, and so on.

- At the beginning of the pre−sleep phase try to incorporate simple acts (such as walking along a forest path) into your dream.

- As already mentioned, use suggestions that are compatible with falling asleep – ones you can "take to bed with you" – such as lying on a beach or a meadow.

- Use physical perception as with autogenic training, concentrating fully on the feeling of your body (relaxing the arm and leg muscles, breathing, and so on).

- Last but not least, do not force yourself to experience lucid dreaming and visualization every night. Rather, repeat to yourself before you fall asleep that you are going to dream consciously and observantly, and just let it happen. Simply go to bed with the thought that a lucid dream might possibly occur.

- This type of anti−stress training through visualization or lucid dreaming at night can also be used in connection with relaxation techniques during the day. Close your eyes and try to visualize the following mental images. Simply repeat each sentence in your mind and let a mental image of the scene arise.

    ↔ You're sitting in a deckchair, observing the sea
    ↔ You're lying on soft grass in a forest clearing
    ↔ You're strolling alone on a beach
    ↔ You're floating as free as a bird, gliding above the landscape, looking down on the world
    ↔ You're lying in the bath, enjoying the agreeable feeling of warmth and relaxation.

If for any reason you think that you're not immediately able to combine such exercises with the relaxation technique of your preference, simply do the following. Before closing your eyes and starting to relax, ask yourself while still wide awake what you want to visualize. By so doing, you prepare your consciousness for the image you will then incorporate into your relaxation exercise. Ensure that the image you conjure up is of a positive nature. Don't be afraid of inventing your own images. Make use of the opportunity to concentrate on the details and particularities of the image.

The following may help you in this:
Ask yourself which season it is in your image.

Ask yourself what time of day it is in the image and what the weather is like.

Questions regarding sensory impressions are of particular importance. In other words, what can you see, hear, smell, taste and feel?

As with lucid dreaming, in visualization you can 'plan' your images in advance by first becoming aware of your sensory impressions and then asking yourself with closed eyes what it is that you sense. Some people are able to prepare themselves excellently for relaxation with visualization using mandalas, which they look at for a few minutes beforehand. The use of mandalas is a form of training access 'to within'. Incidentally, here the properties of the optic nerve are used during the brain's processing of symmetrical shapes. This can have the effect of limiting one's consciousness, which in turn can lead to a state of trance and even to a meditative state of imaginative relaxation. Take a look at the image below for a couple of minutes until the shapes disappear and a pleasant sensation of tiredness forces your eyes to close. You may then sink into deep relaxation for a few minutes, which could be followed by a period of visualization.

Another Method of Using Our Brain−Maps: Neuro−Linguistic Programing (NLP)

How our Consciousness can be Positively Programmed

Our self−confidence often suffers because memories of negative situations unduly influence the way we behave. In the next chapter, I'll show you in four easy steps how we can overcome this problem. We all know that the roots of success lie in our mind. Of course it's easy for me to say that – but it really is true! For instance, if we experience something negative once, through becoming doom−laden in our outlook on life we are more likely to experience it again. Even though we are well aware that this is a negative anticipatory attitude, it is difficult for us to find a way out of this awkward situation. Those who expect failure are more likely to find it. Similarly, those who expect success are usually more successful in life. And how do we learn to become more positive? The following sections explore a tried and tested method of neuro−linguistic programing, or NLP for short.

A brief introduction to NLP:
The first time I heard about neuro−linguistic programing, I thought it was a new computer language. But I was greatly mistaken: NLP is a process or way of thinking that can be used in our everyday lives, in management and in personnel management. The process makes use of modern neurological and psychological knowledge that can also be employed within relaxation techniques. The basic idea behind NLP originated in the USA in the 1970s, and rapidly gained in popularity in the field of human communication. In recent years, I have noticed that its effectiveness in aiding communication can also be transferred to the relaxation groups that I run on self−awareness and improving quality of life.

When Richard Bandler and John Grinder developed NLP in the 1970s, they analyzed the successful therapeutic methods of Milton Ericson (hypnotherapy), Fritz Pearls (gestalt therapy) and Virginia Satir (family therapy). Despite their methodological variance, Bandler and Grinder came to the conclusion that they could use successful concepts that various therapies had in common. From these aspects, Bandler and Grinder derived their own rules and models, which they then field tested. They did not develop a completely new theory; they simply put together a model based on the best aspects of other proven strategies. The reason for the success of this model can be explained by its abbreviated form, NLP.

The "N" stands for "neuro", which is the Greek word for the nerve. The basic assumption here is that each human behavior pattern is a result of neurological processes in which information is reduced, filtered, optimized or strengthened. The information itself is determined and evaluated via the brain through the sensory organs. Information either occurs in the form of external stimuli or it comes from within. This process is particularly useful when applying relaxation techniques that deal with one's consciousness of one's own body. The sympathetic or vegetative nervous system forms its regulatory circuits, which are controlled by the brain. Conscious and unconscious processes flow together. Our brain governs various different states of consciousness and stages of attentiveness. Relaxation techniques take advantage of our skill in being able to call up particular states of consciousness.

The "L" is derived from the Latin word "lingua", which means language. It means that all neural experiences (not only those from the outside, but also inner and emotional experiences) have to be represented through language in order to be consciously perceived.

Language, as a communication system, is the prerequisite for us being able to deal with all those impressions and experiences from the inner and outer world. The concept can also be explained psychologically: emotions can only be consciously conveyed between us and our environment if they can be represented linguistically. Otherwise they remain diffuse and unreal. Any interpretations and analyses we then make are, of course, dependent on our individual experiences of life. For this reason, many relaxation techniques develop our powers of perception through the repetition of basic sentences. Autogenic training does this, as we have seen.

The "P" stands for programing, and means that patterns of different sensory perceptions can be used systematically according to learning criteria. By repeating particular processes, certain perceptions become reproducible. Processes that are repeated have a strengthening 'presence' in the brain. For instance, we learn the technique of driving an automobile and the meaning of road signs by repeating exercises, and are then able to steer our vehicles in a virtually automatic manner. Learning from success simply means repeating what we might call 'positive learned outcomes'.

Please note: The repetition of negative experiences and failures can have unfortunate consequences, since negative experiences are also stored in the brain. Try, therefore, to repeat only positive things in the course of the day – or at least try to do these things more consciously in order to store them as deeply as possible. Remember, human learning can happen consciously or unconsciously, and some things are learned against our will.

The frequent repetition of relaxation exercises can also 'boost' the overall effect. Let's take the example of advertising: by repeating set phrases, things become anchored in our memories. Or consider those catchy tunes that we hear on the radio every morning on our way to work – these can easily imprint themselves on our minds for the rest of the day (whether we want them to, or not).

I will now summarize the important aspects of NLP:
We take in most information and stimuli on an unconscious or only partially conscious level. We're only really aware of information that crops up suddenly or unexpectedly. This 'surprise' mechanism is very useful because it enables us to zoom in on urgent information that would otherwise be lost in the flood of stimuli we encounter every day. In other words, our subconscious reduces the amount of work the brain has to do. Important things remain in the mind and unimportant stimuli fall by the wayside. In the way I've just described, exceptional events stay anchored in the brain due to the nature of their initial appearance there. For instance: the first landing on the moon was a very special occasion. Subsequent landings, however, failed to captivate the public interest. Do you know who the second group of 'moon walkers' were? All information we receive is assessed comparatively and put into context with past experiences. We could say that our brain functions as a storage facility, pooling certain life experiences; these experiences influence our daily behavioral patterns.

Feelings and emotions are the main factor controlling our behavior. Yet we are not able consciously to 'use' our feelings – they simply occur. For this reason, it is critically important that we treat our emotions and those of others with reverence. Personal creativity is very much dependent on the integration of factual and emotional evaluation. General intelligence alone is not decisive in the decisions we make in the course of our lives – our emotional backgrounds also have important roles to play.

There are a few expressions within NLP I would like to introduce you to. To start with, when we ‘anchor’ something – the relaxed feeling we experienced on observing a sunset at the beach, say – we can ‘recreate’ it simply by remembering the situation (possibly with closed eyes, in a relaxation phase or possibly a trance). The same feeling is called up. A trance is a kind of dream state or doze in which everything else is blended out of the picture. It’s rather like shining a torch on something: some things appear clearly, the surrounding areas are darker. In a trance, our consciousness becomes selective, similar to when we watch an exciting film on television, shutting everything else out around us. Likewise, I’m sure you’ve experienced hearing a certain song which automatically makes you think of a certain situation in the past – perhaps reminding you of a past love or a special occasion. We listen to the music and, at the same time, perceive images of the memories we have of the past.

Our experiences can be recalled more easily if they have been anchored securely in the brain. Recollection then takes place almost like a reflex: if you think hard about the taste of a lemon, don’t you find that your mouth is watering because you can imagine how terribly bitter lemons are? If you have never eaten a lemon, however, you will not be able to experience such a reaction to the idea of one. Anchoring takes place continually in psychosomatic processes. We use anchors daily: a particular smell might make us think of the last barbecue we had, a perfume could remind us of a past love, and so on. Anchors can also be ‘stacked’ on top of each another. One memory can trigger another or lead to another, and so forth. Our brain then lines up certain memories behind each other on the basis of the triggered emotions, that is to say according to which impressions were biggest or most decisive. Thus NLP differentiates between auditory anchoring (memories and feelings that are heard), so−called kinesthetic anchoring (when we remember the touch of a person or the temperature on holiday), other anchors that are connected to experiencing certain feelings, and visual anchors, which are the most significant of all.

Please note: We can learn to trigger positive perceptions using NLP.

Negative experiences can be stored, but also deleted by not being repeated again. It’s vice versa for positive experiences. When you practice your relaxation techniques, try to repeat these in order to anchor them initially and later to strengthen them. Since the storage capacity of the brain is not unlimited, many people find it important to regain storage space by forgetting negative experiences.

How then does general human communication function according to these criteria?
During the day, a so−called rapport is made through communicating with other people. We observe a person’s eye movement, watch them adapting to the other taking or conceding the initiative. In conversation, contents, results or decisions can all be anchored. Another important term within NLP is one that is used by many therapists: the so−called PENE trance – penetration of a trance – this is a possible consequence of the mechanisms just described. A selected state of consciousness or relaxation (remember the torch image), or an experience, or a situative feeling, penetrates the barriers of the subconscious and emerges in the consciousness. In NLP, we say “It models the situation”. (This phenomenon can then be used, for example, to get rid of a phobia.) Imagine a conversation with your boss that causes you anxiety. Now recall which features stood out in particular as positive regarding your experience with your boss and make a habit of thinking about these positive features. You’ll feel more relaxed and less anxious compared to before. This illustrates the PENE trance model. Precisely these mechanisms are exploited in the advertising industry or in sales. However, you can use them privately. When you next go to a party, try to build up an optimal rapport with somebody – in NLP terminology, ‘pace’. Then ‘lead’ the encounter to show

yourself how you can achieve something by catching someone's attention on an emotional level. Other therapeutic steps can also enable individuals to change, resulting in a 'changed history'. The example I'm about to relate illustrates vividly how a defeat can be turned into a victory. Before I proceed to the example, however, I'd like to introduce you to just one more term: "reframing". This refers to finding new frameworks for particular situations.

The following example is taken from one of my therapy sessions:
A woman was desperately unhappy because her partner left her after a relationship of many years. On an emotional level, the women felt deserted and abandoned. She complained of feeling emotionally "cheated". But speaking with her, it became apparent that the relationship had stifled her creativity. After the separation she had the opportunity of making use of her own ideas and resources. You see, we should look on the bright side and recognize the positive aspect of the separation. In so doing, the act of separation was 'reframed'.

It's clear to see that particular emotional situations can be seen from various points of view. Seeing things from different angles always means gaining so−called 'resources', which represent power, energy, skills and experiences that until now have been untapped. If the aim is obvious (in this case, getting out of the so−called depressive trough), the therapist can use sensory−specific methods to clarify objectives and work towards them with the patient. To aid this, NLP makes use of the following physiological channels:

"V" = visual (observing one's counterpart)
"A" = auditory (perceiving the sound of their voice)
"K" = kinesthetic (posture, feeling contact to others, and so forth)
"O" = olfactory and gustatory (perceiving smell and taste).

To conclude, NLP can be used in all fields, and is popular in business, education, for medical practitioners and other communicative processes, since it enables positive changes to be implemented in a fun way. The resulting 'positive thinking' helps us to lead our lives more easily which, in turn, enables us to sleep better and act in a more balanced way. Nearly all relaxation methods use such channels as I have described to anchor and store positive emotions, leading to changes in the body. The skills and creativity of the individual are thus recognized and utilized.

Be Your Own Coach – Four Steps Towards Success

I'd now like to describe four steps that can improve your self−confidence through cognition.

Cognitive processing, which can be applied either with or without relaxation exercises (perception, thinking, learning).

Step 1: A dilemma or a failure cannot and should not be denied. You have to take the first step of recalling a failure – completely – in order to be able to delete it later. You can only deal with the whole fiasco of a negative experience if you have reminded yourself of the whole negative situation. Delve deep into your memory: what happened? What did you say to your counterpart? What did you do? What did your counterpart do? What did you feel at the time, and where in your body did you feel it? Try to recall all the impressions you experienced, especially those that you felt within your body at the time of the negative episode. This may not be very pleasant: nobody likes to be reminded of personal failures. Since the failure cannot be denied, however, recalling it is an absolutely necessity before proceeding to the 'inner cleansing process' that will transform the failure into a successful situation.

Step 2: Once you have spent some amount of time reliving the failure, you won't be feeling particularly good – you'll experience a kind of inner stress and a generally negative mood. This stress can be successfully treated using relaxation techniques. Just remember that you can free yourself from the spell of failure using a different kind of perception. One way to liberate yourself is to 'shake off' this bad mood like an athlete who, after a race, shakes his arms and legs and takes a deep breath. In this manner, you can form a creatively enabling distance between yourself and obstructive situations. Beat your limited negative consciousness with a few minutes of muscular exercises (perhaps two or three exercises from the Jacobsen Technique). This could then be followed by a brief relaxation exercise, such as the heaviness or breathing exercise from autogenic training, allowing you to experience your body in its relaxed basic position.

Step 3: After having completed steps 1 and 2, you should create a different ending to the troublesome situation you have recalled, rather like writing a new script for a film. I find it best to jot down the new 'scene'. To begin, for each negative impression you experienced in step 1, find a complementary positive impression. If, for instance, your mind's eye visualized an argument with your superior, who shouted at you and made you very upset, try imagining that instead of just sitting there and 'taking it', you stated your opinion calmly but firmly. Proceed in this manner through the whole situation, writing a new, positive 'script' showing how you should have behaved in the negative situation. Only write down the positive changes. Give yourself time to 'take to heart' the scenes in the new version of the situation, rather than the old ones: hear, smell, see, feel and touch everything that occurs before your mind's eye. After writing this down, compare what you've got with the old mental scene. If your revised script is positive, write underneath it that you feel good. Just as an example, the conversation with your boss could be split into two or three rewritten 'scenes', just like in a real play, acted out one after the other. The overall result will manifest itself as positive self−confidence.

Step 4: The new film or scenes that you have written down need to be stored in order for you to regain your self−confidence. Repeat the new version and scenes five or six times until you can be sure you remember them. By doing this, you delete the old experiences without

actually having to deny them. We cannot pretend the fiasco never happened – we simply need to recognize the failure, relive it, and rewrite it, and store the new solution in our minds.

If you take the time to work on these four steps, you'll learn to feel good, particularly if you combine the process with a self−relaxation technique, treating yourself to a period of relaxation after all the hard work. In this respect, forgetting is a form of mental hygiene in which useless information is discarded.

Your Mind and Meditation –

Routes to Mental Fitness

With the help of meditation, we can attain a similar state of relaxation to that achieved through the relaxation techniques I've been describing in earlier chapters. Meditation requires greater mental skills to enable us to 'listen to' our inner perceptions, however. A brief daily period of meditation means giving yourself time to reflect, time to immerse yourself in your thoughts in order to create new strength. Meditation will not enable you to solve everyday problems like some of the other techniques I've described; but it does give you an opportunity to approach solutions to problems in a more creative, optimistic and relaxed manner. Daily relaxation using meditation exercises leads to a balance of the mind−body axis, which in turn leads to greater balance on a psychosomatic level. Besides practicing a relaxed posture, you also make use of your mental powers and learn how to 'let go'. The best part is that both young and old can learn brief meditation exercises.

To clarify: meditation means practicing deep relaxation for 10−20 minutes; 'letting go' means changing your everyday perception. For instance, you can learn how to perceive things around you in certain situations more consciously. Just remind yourself that the benefits of meditation are as positive as dancing and smiling, balancing our consciousness, eradicating limitations, and bringing about a state of inner harmony. People who are able to meditate tend to be more fun−loving, liberal, and receptive to new things. In other words, if you learn to relax at the right time, you'll be able to approach new situations in a more concentrated, attentive and successful manner.

A: Self−assessment and posture
First of all, determine how your body talks to you. Try to be unbiased. High blood pressure could mean that you are under too much pressure in general. Frequent headaches could mean that you rack your brains too often. The cause of respiratory disorders usually lies with a shock you have experienced, something that is troubling you or causing general anxiety. And psychogenic itching could mean that something gets under your skin.

Perhaps you could use these examples to interpret your own body language. First ask yourself where your channels of expression exist on the psychosomatic level? Maybe your muscles or possibly your neck or lumbar spine are often tense during the day? Maybe you frequently suffer from backache? Do you generally feel tense, have cold hands, cold feet, and so forth? Or do you often visualize negative things, anxieties or mental constraints that frequently impose themselves on you, blocking your mind. By asking yourself these sorts of questions, you'll gain an overview of the initial state of your body and the language it uses. You first need to recognize and eradicate your negative habits before we can begin introducing countermeasures, otherwise they could disturb your trance−like, meditative relaxation. If we know the meaning of our negative habits – the reason why they occur – we can accept them more easily should they crop up during the first few weeks of relaxation. Only then can we carefully proceed to step 2, which involves both bodily perception and concentrative relaxation. Only those who have learned concentrative relaxation properly can then proceed to learn meditative relaxation or meditation, one of the deepest forms of relaxation.

Are you motivated enough to practice relaxation exercises for the mind−body axis? Do you have the right degree of self−control and self−restraint, as well as the readiness to set aside at least 10−20 minutes per day for the exercises?

B: The initial physical position – breathing and the mind – the key to meditative relaxation

All bodily perceptions and psychosomatic interlinks are closely connected to our breathing. Indeed it is absolutely normal that our mental state and physical conditions should be reflected – usually unconsciously – in our breathing patterns. So in other words, our breathing expresses the condition of our mind−body axis. If we are nervous and rushed, we tend to hold our breath, become excited, and breathe irregularly. From a medical point of view a relaxed, beneficial form of breathing is slow, deep and rhythmic and automatically follows our own basic physiological rhythms. Our breathing is controlled by the brain stem (respiratory center with pace−maker cells that have a feedback link to outer stimuli). Breathing also plays a decisive role in all other vegetative functions, so that different sorts of physical movement, as well as mental and emotional states, influence our breathing. We can utilize different respiratory patterns for meditative relaxation. The regulation of our breathing usually occurs without us consciously doing anything. Unfortunately, however, many people only recognize the subtle interchanges between the body, mind and breathing when they become ill (breathing reflects not only positive, but also negative situations). In the second step towards deep relaxation, it is important for you to become aware of your breathing by practicing mental feedback; at the same time, you should ensure that your breathing occurs passively and calmly.

I'll now describe another advanced breathing exercise:

Make sure that nobody can disturb you. Lie down on a cover on the floor or sit in a comfortable armchair, close your eyes, relax your arms and legs, and concentrate on your breathing. Without trying to influence your natural breathing rhythm, concentrate on how regularly you breathe in and out. Notice how when you exhale your chest muscles, as well as other muscle groups, automatically relax. Without altering your breathing rhythm, practice the following exercise every day for around two weeks:

Don't try to breathe more slowly or quickly than usual, or more or less deeply. Simply focus on your breathing. After practicing this for 3−5 minutes every day, you will start to feel a sensation of general relaxation. Most practitioners also feel that their arms and legs become heavy, just like in autogenic training, actually leading to a measurably higher body temperature. After a few days or so, your breathing will automatically change from 'costal' to abdominal respiration. For the first two to three weeks, simply concentrate on your breathing rhythm. Try not to drift off into visualization. Incidentally, this particular breathing technique is used in Zen Buddhism to enhance relaxation and induce a trance−like state. By restricting our consciousness to an awareness of our breathing rhythm we can generate a general state of relaxation without resorting to more complicated techniques.

In this way we achieve a harmonious balance. You might like to think of it as a "flow" of bodily processes, combined with mental energy. The mind becomes free because we do not need to think of anything else. If other thoughts do arise, we simply return to concentrating on the rhythm of our breathing.

Please note:
The first step in this method entails limiting your general attentiveness and concentrating on your breathing rhythm. Practice this for a few weeks. Feel the changes that take place at other levels of perception within the body: general calmness, relaxation of muscles, warmth, and so forth.

C: Experiencing changes – combined with feedback

Meditative relaxation is largely passive, unlike other relaxation techniques where active visualization or controlled lucid dreams are required. Meditative relaxation nevertheless leads to a complete feeling of release. Don't worry about controlling your thoughts or inner perceptions; simply empty your mind. During this third step, if any distracting thoughts break in on one make them disappear through the 'open door' in the cinema of your consciousness. In fact, you should make superfluous 'thought films' fade, even if they are positive visualization images. This will lead to a level of contemplation representing a state of increased emotional receptiveness. Moreover, it works better the more often we practice it. Of course, this third step is easier said than done, and many people get stuck here. Persevere. Step four is pure meditation – it's the blissful step into emptiness.

Anyone with enough patience to practice the points described above can succeed in moving from a trance, to visualization, and on into a state of deep calmness and relaxation. The next stage of complete emptiness, or regression (stepping back to earlier stages in our psychological development that has brought about change), is equally as important as steps 1 and 2. But we need to believe in ourselves if we are to achieve it. In fact, basic trust in

ourselves provides us with a basic positive structure within meditation. This is why our mind−body equilibrium lies poised between tension and relaxation, retention and letting go through concentration, trance or regression techniques. I hope this helps you understand what I said earlier about how visualization and dream images bring up very deep, personality−specific contents from our consciousness that nonetheless can be 'emptied' again. These 'contents' are not simply deleted or ignored – they are 'dealt with'. Only then can we achieve true balance.

Please note:
Steps towards changing your consciousness:

- ↔ switch off inner and outer stimuli through relaxation techniques
- ↔ increase physical and mental balance
- ↔ move from visualization and trance to a meditative state

Meditation, then, represents a crossing of the mental and physical borderline. Similar to an archer who concentrates fully on the target – a process that involves the brain at both conscious and unconscious levels – anyone who meditates requires all levels of consciousness to interact. Under normal circumstances, however, these levels cannot be called up simultaneously. To return to the figure of the archer, only by learning to change his or her consciousness can the archer attain a level of concentration necessary to shut out the external outside world and direct the arrow at the opportune moment. It's similar with relaxation, except that in the moment you switch to meditation activity is no longer your target, but rather complete passivity – the step into emptiness. Nobody can explain meditation better than Ma Deva Pratito: "Zen meditation is an explanation of neither life nor existence. Zen is experience, and not explanation. Zen is not an ideology." Of course, even this helpful definition is only an attempt to represent something that cannot be explained. Despite all our scientific knowledge, medical explanations and complex interpretations, we can only touch the edges of meditation. Andres Elten describes meditation thus: "Like spatial time in modern physics, Zen is a dimension that lies beyond our comprehension and sensory perception. This dimension only discloses itself to those who meditate, for meditation is the art of switching off thoughts, and a means of perception that is free from all associations and projections."

From my medical/psychotherapeutic point of view, and as a researcher of dreams, I think that the limits of that which can be understood have been encountered here. Only very few people are able to meditate properly. In order to do it, you need to be very stable and not expect to find any solutions to problems. There is a negative side to crossing mind−body borders: some people lose their grip on the 'real world' and can no longer assess what is real and what is imagined; there is even a danger of weak people drifting into an 'inner world', possibly into psychoses and a loss of reality. But I also believe that the relaxation techniques I have described can have a stabilizing effect on the mind−body axis. It is true that many people are impatient and want to experience apparently deeper dimensions; this is only natural. I consider it far more important, however, to get to know your own borders and gauge your ability to cope with stress before practicing and applying relaxation techniques that can bring about personal balance and optimize your own psychosomatics.

For Stressed Parents and Kids!

Children can also benefit from relaxation techniques

Bild: “I’m lying on a meadow, dreaming”

Bild: “I’m thinking of my small island with palm trees and a deckchair” (Ricarda)

Years of experience have shown that children, too, can benefit greatly from relaxation techniques. As a parent, you know of course why a short period of daily relaxation can be helpful in combating psychosomatic disorders that can occur from the age of five or six onwards. All of us, including our children, become acquainted with psychosomatic and stress phenomena at an early age. This is due to our hectic environment and also to the rise in the number of broken families. In other words, whenever our mind−body balance becomes upset, not only adults but children, too, can regain a healthy balance by practicing targeted relaxation. Even primary−school children understand that psychovegetative disorders can be explained by an imbalance between psychosomatic processes. They realize that fear of certain situations can lead to physical disorders, just as happiness can have a positive effect on their bodies. Moreover, children have one great advantage over adults: they find it easier to fantasize and visualize. Adults often have difficulty conjuring up images inside their minds, but children have no problem inventing images and stories. Children, however, also need to practice relaxation exercises on a daily basis. My experience has shown that doing exercises before sitting down to homework can noticeably improve the child’s concentration. This does not mean that the child has to learn even more at home in addition to school work – it simply means that the child learns to carry out his or her tasks with fewer problems and with increased concentration. Children appreciate that trouble can trigger headaches, stomach ache, and so forth. They are particularly good at learning to use these links positively – whether before a test at school or before a judo competition – in order to be able to concentrate better and to be physically fitter. Incidentally, one hardly needs to add that children are far more capable of learning new things than adults. But we should note here that their motivation is greater if parents make sure that there is no pressure attached to doing the relaxation exercises (although they should nevertheless be practiced on a regular basis). My experience has also shown that techniques like autogenic training can be mastered more quickly by children and teenagers than by adults. After just 6 to 12 weeks of daily training, improvements in school performance are noticeable; children are able to concentrate more, and are in a better position to gain control over habit spasms or other nervous disorders. From a medical point of view, it is unfortunately plain to see that psychosomatic disorders in children are on the increase. Even in primary school. It is known that increased stress (for instance, due to fear of tests), leads to a range of illnesses, including gastrointestinal disorders and sleeping disorders. But most children want to eradicate these disorders and once your child has learned to apply the positive effects of the techniques I have been describing, he or she will be able to benefit from self−help for the rest of their lives. So−called vegetative disorders, such as umbilical colics, speech disorders (including stuttering), hay−fever, allergies, and headaches can also be treated using relaxation techniques. Children tend to view learning to relax as just another learning process, like learning to ride a bike, swim or run. The main thing is that the child should learn to practice of his or her own accord. You should not convey the feeling that the child *has* to learn a new task, or *has* to relax; don’t put any pressure on your child – instead show him or her that relaxation can be fun. Give your child time to carry out the daily exercises, possibly in their own bedroom. As I said, I have found over the years that children benefit most if relaxation exercises are practiced for around 15 minutes before starting their homework. Parents should cautiously enquire how the

exercises are going, for instance: “How are you coming along with your relaxation exercises? Are you enjoying them?” The child should not feel that he or she is being pressurized or supervised. Incidentally, I often find myself welcoming parents and other family members to my relaxation courses after they have seen how their offspring benefit from just a few weeks of training in the children’s group.

Autogenic training, for instance, has proved to be very successful in treating the following disorders and illnesses:

Psychosomatic dysfunctions

- umbilical colics
- travel sickness
- severe constipation
- sleeping disorders
- enuresis
- encopresis
- hyperkinetic syndrome
- headaches
- orthostatic circulatory disturbances

Psychosomatic illnesses

- asthmatic complaints and bronchitis
- colonic inflammation in children
- gastrointestinal disorders
- social relationship disturbances
- identity crises
- sibling−related problems
- disturbed parent−child relationships
- school problems
- disturbed teacher−pupil relationships
- behavioral disorders
- concentration disorders
- ideomotor restlessness
- stuttering
- aggression
- anxieties
- inhibitions
- nail−biting and other “habit spasms”.

Unfortunately, the above disorders and illnesses occur frequently in our society. A relaxation technique, together with out−patient psychotherapy, can work wonders. The benefits for children are clear to see, and it’s all helped along by the fact that they find it easy to dive into visualization and to let go (unlike adults, who usually look for scientific explanations to understand how mechanisms function). One thing to note: mothers and fathers should not practice relaxation techniques with their children. Instead, they should set extra time aside to practice alone. Relaxation is something you do for yourself, by yourself. Above all, children should not consider themselves as ill – or view relaxation as a form of medicine. On the

contrary, children should simply accept that relaxation is good for them, pleasant and enjoyable. Astronauts and athletes also use targeted relaxation to improve their skills – you could tell them that!

Bild: Pictures and drawings containing targeted messages help children learn the exercises more quickly

Concluding Thoughts – It's Never Too Late

Now that you've read this book, I presume you'll have noticed that the main idea is to avoid forcing a method of relaxation into your life. It's much better to introduce **small changes into your life**; these will then help you achieve inner balance. In my opinion we can all achieve a better state of psychosomatic health by training. Besides being mentally receptive to relaxation techniques, you should try to lead a healthy life. Excessive use of alcohol, nicotine or other substances are often only an expression of compensatory addictive behavior that ought to be got firmly under control. Running away into the arms of an addiction is sometimes understandable but does not solve anything.

Too many people are physically and psychologically inactive. Even a daily brief walk through the woods, just 15 minutes or so, can help us to achieve inner balance. These walks could be thought of as 'relaxation islands', as mental and physical 'hammocks'. When walking, you should avoid making plans or organizing your thoughts – simply enjoy a brief period of relaxation, take a good look at the flora and fauna in the woods, notice things you would normally overlook. This in itself is a short exercise in perception, and like the others I have described, leads to a feeling of relaxation. Positive journeys into your own personality are always more effective if your day is improved with a 'pinch' of relaxation.

It's probably clear to you by now that the aim in relaxing is not simply to switch off, but to be aware of why we *need* to switch off (to recharge our inner mind−body 'battery'). You also need to discover your own personal sense of well−being. Fun activities, such as games, dancing, sport and walks, help in this process; but make sure you never forget your most important sense: hearing. Music changes our mental disposition and can quickly create a positive, relaxing atmosphere. Enjoyment, well−being, and psychosomatic experiences are known to be heavily influenced – both positively and negatively – by sounds. Tones and oscillations work on our minds and bodies before we even realize it. Our ears are thus also gates to our mental health. Listening to a piece of music can be just as good at creating an environment of meditative relaxation as, for instance, autogenic training. The visualization images I described earlier can also be intensified with the use of sounds and aural accompaniments such as 'mood' sounds of the sea, and so on.

As a matter of fact, visualization is always strengthened with the use of sounds. Think of how film music increases suspense in some scenes, or else pleasantly reduces the tension. Advertising psychology exploits these unconscious mechanisms – for instance, we get pleasant background music in shops to promote an atmosphere that is conducive to people buying things. Learn from the professionals – take the time to listen to some music that helps you visualize. Music also has the power to alter your feelings – sometimes in a negative manner. Rhythmic, monotonous, overloud music can make us nervous and aggressive, leading to headaches or a pounding heart. Actually, excessive noise can trigger distress, disturbing our sense of well−being.

All individuals, from babies to the elderly, need their very own music. Whales and dolphins talking to each other under the sea near the Indian Point Lodge in Canada was a key experience for me. I realized that humans and animals had their own way of communicating with each other. Different people have different preferences, different needs. All you have to do is find out what kind of sounds yours are. Experiment with different sorts of music and sounds – it's fun.

If you take my advice to heart and follow one of the relaxation methods I have outlined in this book, you will gain a '**mental fitness**' that will help you in your working and private life. Your **quality of life** will improve without you having to force yourself to feel good (which no−one can). I'm sure you're well aware by now that the learning potential of your brain can be exploited more fully if you allow yourself targeted phases of calmness. Ultimately this means that you will learn to spread your energy more efficiently over the day. One thing I encounter regularly as a sleep practitioner is people planning their day 'against' their biological rhythms. Of course I'm also aware that it is sometimes difficult to change habits and established patterns of behavior. After just a few weeks of practicing relaxation, however, you will start to feel better and more balanced.

Finally, relaxation does not simply mean going to sleep. In many of the relaxation methods I have drawn into focus, your body slips into a state of deep relaxation, but your mind remains wide awake. That is to say, your brain is simply active in a different way. We need to experience the opposite states of tension *and* relaxation to achieve an ideal state of well−being, balance, and to be able to live in harmony. Use your 'little gray cells' more consciously. The key to success lies within you.

New York/Osnabrück/Canada, August 2001

Bild: "Letting Go"