

## **SHRINK RAP - Camping Therapy**

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On a recent and rare vacation, as we sat admiring a picturesque lake with snow-capped mountains above, my wife remarked: "I think I forgot how to do nothing." No phones, no email, no television. It reminded me how easy it is to get caught up in our stressful lives without taking the time to clear our minds and simply relax.

As a society, we tend to underestimate the importance of relaxation, much to our detriment. After all, stress is often at the root of a variety of physical (e.g. coronary disease, high blood pressure, weakened immune system, etc.) and psychological (depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, etc.) health problems.

While stressful events are often unavoidable, the way we deal with stress can dramatically affect the impact that it has upon us. One effective way is to modify our thinking. Known as cognitive therapy, this approach focuses on reducing unhealthy negative thoughts and replacing them with more positive rational ones. Another way is to learn relaxation techniques. The mind is very powerful and if we focus on a very relaxing image, the body eventually experiences it as though we're really there. To see for yourself, try this simple exercise:

1. Identify a place that you've been that was very relaxing (e.g. a beach, the mountains). If needed, make one up.
2. List everything that you might see, hear, smell and (tactilely) feel in this special place.
3. Rate your current level of stress from "0" (not stressed) to "100" (very stressed).
4. Find a peaceful place to sit, close your eyes, take a deep breath in and breathe out slowly.
5. Try to imagine all the details that you listed in your mind's eye, while periodically repeating the deep breathing.
6. After 5-10 minutes slowly open your eyes and re-rate your current level of stress. Notice how much more relaxed you feel.

Of course, being there is even better than imagining it. We live in a culture where many people underutilize, and sometimes as a result lose, vacation time. If you have the time and can afford it, an even better idea is to actually go to a relaxing place and enjoy it. While beaches can be a challenge in Colorado, we have some of the most beautiful places to recreate in the country. Incredible campgrounds, cabins, lakes, mountains and meadows, all within a few minutes to a few hours drive.

This is the perfect time of year where even over the course of a weekend, you can take a break from the usual grind and treat yourself to a chance to unplug, unwind, and renew. An opportunity to slow down, quiet that constant internal voice, experience a shared look into a campfire or the numerous stars above and to begin rejuvenating the mind and soul. Whether it's just in your mind's eye or the real thing, make an effort to find the time to relax. Your mind and body (as well as family, friends, and coworkers) will be glad you did.