

**About Health TV with Jeanne Blake**  
**Teen Stress**  
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JEANNE BLAKE: Welcome to *About Health TV*, I'm Jeanne Blake. There's no escaping it, we live in a stressful world and young people are not immune from stress. Not only are they trying to fit in and figure out who they are, they absorb stress from the world and the adults around them. On this edition of *About Health TV* we'll learn about a program that's helping young people deal with stress more effectively. Joining us for this discussion is Rana Chadnofsky, the Director of the Education Initiative for the Benson Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Mass General Hospital. A little bit later in the program we'll be joined by two high school students who will tell us how they are benefiting from the program. Rana, thanks for joining us.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Thank you for having us.

JEANNE BLAKE: A lot of people are already familiar with Dr. Herbert Benson's Relaxation Response in which this program is built, but for those who aren't, tell us what it is?

RANA CHADNOFSKY: What is the Relaxation Response? It's the state of passive attention so having that non-judgmental attitude when we have a busy mind when our thoughts are going from the future in trying to keep it to the present moment and then focusing on a repetitive motion or an absorbing stimulus so it could be being in the gym and just focusing on your left leg and your right leg and connecting that to the breath or the diaphragmatic breathing. What it's doing is it's decreasing the arousal of the sympathetic nervous system. So it's just a state of profound rest.

JEANNE BLAKE: But it's not, I guess some people might think that it's just meditation. I mean, I don't mean just meditation, I'm a big fan of meditation but it's more than meditation.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: It is and I think that's why it's so compelling in school systems because it's really an umbrella so when we think of the Relaxation Response we can work within progressive muscle relaxation, doing some Yoga so for students who it's very difficult for them to sit in a half lotus position, this Relaxation Response really offers many different components. What we're doing in the schools is we're trying to find one way for each student that really works for them, that relaxes for them. It might be some visualization techniques.

JEANNE BLAKE: And?

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Visualization techniques.

JEANNE BLAKE: I really want to try and get a picture of what this is.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Sure. So it could be visualization around maybe one student is nervous about public speaking and so they're going to visualize themselves very calm and confident, what the audience is going to be like when they're performing. It could be around test-taking anxiety. The student's feeling like they have that busy/active mind. They are about to take the test and I'm going to ask them to focus on the second hand of a clock for 30 seconds or 60 seconds just to get your mind focused and out of that busy mind so you can really do well and help yourself access that long and short term memory for the exam.

JEANNE BLAKE: In the schools they do do this in a group setting though? It's not one-on-one, it's a group setting is how I'm picturing it.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Exactly. In the schools for this to work is a train-the-trainer model so first we're working with the faculty which is including everybody so teachers, gym teachers, drama instructors, admin and we're training them on the skills and also for their own use because we can't be bringing this to the classroom if you don't really understand how to use it for your own body and then sometimes we're modeling it for the teachers and how to work with students or then sometimes we're working with the students directly.

JEANNE BLAKE: This Relaxation Response or this approach to handling stress is used in a variety of conditions I should say, medical conditions, it's not the school initiative which we'll obviously hear a lot more about, came after its use with cardiac patients, cancer patients, just tell us a little bit about that.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Sure. So we're a world leader in mind/body medicine. The Benson Henry Institute. We were running several different clinical programs and back in the late 1980's Marilyn Wilcher and Dr. Herbert Benson thought that this was really important to bring into schools and Universities. There was a lash of suicides at that time so the education initiative is really based on the clinical programs. So when you come to the Benson Henry Institute you'll see a number of different programs there. You'll see a cardiac program, programs for people who are dealing with

cancer and aids. Women who are dealing with menopause or fertility issues. So there's many different programs. People who are coming in for some pain reduction. There's regular programs called our MSRP programs that are excellent for people to really help them long-term.

JEANNE BLAKE:                    There's evidence that shows that it works in the school setting.

RANA CHADNOFSKY:                There is. There is. There's several evidence. Several different research studies in Middle School. We've seen increase in GPA, increase in cooperation, lower Cabot scores. At high school level we've seen an increase in self-esteem which is so important. Increase in internal locus of control so students can look inside themselves to make decisions and at the college level we've seen decrease in anxiety and psychological distress.

JEANNE BLAKE:                    I can understand the decrease in anxiety and I can actually understand the increased academic achievement. Help me understand why you think this technique and students practicing this helps with self esteem.

RANA CHADNOFSKY:                Sure. Well I think anytime you are focused and asking yourself to go inside to make decisions, it's increasing your self-esteem. The way the curriculum is really set up is first students learn several different techniques to elicit the relaxation response and finding a technique that works for them. Then at that time we work with the thoughts so many of us have what we call cognitive distortions the negative habits of thinking that cause us more stress and with students we'll go over a list of cognitive distortions. Whether it's perfectionism or the black and white thinking and we'll ask them have you ever done this before? I think it's making them also feel like, wow, I'm not alone. Several of us have this feeling. At that point, when you're in a balanced state of mind then you can actually start challenging the negative thoughts that we might have.

JEANNE BLAKE:                    That's great.

RANA CHADNOFSKY:                Also in the schools we're doing a lot of role plays and so they're realizing, wow, I'm not alone here too.

JEANNE BLAKE:                    I remember being in my thirties before I realized, I remember thinking why didn't someone tell me that adolescence and the teenage years were so hard? Why didn't someone let me know that I wasn't the only one thinking or feeling. I think it's really fantastic that young people are learning that. We're going to hear from some of the young people so we're going to take a quick break

while we bring one of the young people in to talk with him about how he is benefiting from this program. We'll be right back.

BREAK

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PEGGY KEMP: Our students experience a significant amount of stress in their lives. Economic pressure in their families, violence in many of their neighborhoods, relatives affected by the violence, the pressure of doing well in school; Finding a way for them to develop some tools to help them through times of stress, I think is really essential for them to be productive, for them to be able to concentrate and focus on those things that matter.

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JEANNE BLAKE: We continue our discussion now about the Education Initiative of the Benson Henry Mind Body Institute for Medicine out of the Mass General Hospital and this program was brought to the Fenway High School in Boston because of the gym teacher at Fenway High School. His name is Julio Avila. Let's hear what he has to say about the program.

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JULIO AVILA: Think of a place you feel comfortable, relaxed, safe and at ease as they go through a daily things to do in the city. Where is time where they can relax? They go home they have to babysit, they have to study, they have to do so many errands during the day that where is the time to relax? Breath in a sense of calm and peace. Them having this little bit of time here gives them another opportunity to experience something else in their life and I do believe it will help in the long run. It will help them to take that and do it at home and with their peers and their family members.

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JEANNE BLAKE: One of the young people taking part in the program at Fenway is Andre Zayas who is a 9<sup>th</sup> grader. Andre, welcome.

ANDRE ZAYAS: Thanks for having me.

JEANNE BLAKE: So tell us, take us into the world of a 9<sup>th</sup> grader in Boston. Some adults still think that it's not so stressful to be a young person and you know differently. We know differently. Tell us about some of the stresses that you are dealing with day-to-day? You and your friends.

ANDRE ZAYAS: Well it's really, it's crazy. We have friends dying every day. Some of us we live with only one parent. When we're living with one parent it's kind of hard because me being the oldest of the boys, I'm not the oldest in the house, but being the oldest male in the house I am the man of the house. I have a lot of responsibilities. I have a little brother I have to take care and set an example for but at the same time it's hard because, it's just hard. I can't really explain it.

JEANNE BLAKE: I think that we can imagine how hard that would be balancing school and everything that you have to do at home to help your mom.

ANDRE ZAYAS: Yeah.

JEANNE BLAKE: And then living in a violent world.

ANDRE ZAYAS: It was maybe last month, my friend got killed. They say it's an accident but we heard different. I don't know who to believe. I found out the guy who killed him is only getting two years so it just, I was really it took me out of my game for that day I didn't really, I couldn't focus on anything.

JEANNE BLAKE: Andre, other than losing your focus, how would you say this stress of all of the different things that you've described manifest inside of you and how the symptoms that you feel of all of this stress.

ANDRE ZAYAS: Well, I lock down and then I wouldn't want to talk to anybody. I'll get really edgy. Anything that, little things would just set me off. I've started to notice ever since maybe my friend got killed people could just be playing to me and if I'm in a bad mood that day it would set me off. If I'm in a good mood it would take me more to set me off because of the stress but the line between what it would take to set me off when I'm stressed and when I'm having a good day is very thin.

JEANNE BLAKE: I'm sure it is. So, how did you hear about the program at school?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Well, basically I didn't know about it 'til maybe the day, we was working out. We was on the way and Mr. Avila was like, no we're going to gym and there's going to be a program about stress that's going to help us.

JEANNE BLAKE: What did you think at first? Did you think oh, this is going to be hokey or did you think this is a good thing?

ANDRE ZAYAS: I really had kind of mixed feelings because I was having a bad day that day so it was a chance to relax at the same time. I like gym. I like my gym time so it was like I wanted to do it but at the same time, I didn't want to do it.

JEANNE BLAKE: How long ago was that?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Maybe, it was last month.

JEANNE BLAKE: Okay, so you've just been doing this for a month?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Yes.

JEANNE BLAKE: Can you see the benefits?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Off and on because my family, they're going through some rough times and my family doesn't get along all of the time. Nobody does. But it feels like my family's the worst at getting along in certain instances. So when I see that, it's like I try to keep my family together no matter what but it's really hard because, everyone in my family including me they can be hard-headed at times so when people trying to explain to us we'll just lock down.

JEANNE BLAKE: So what do you take from the program that helps you? It's only been a month. That's not a long time for you to really make some of these changes so can you give me an example of recently when you have taken something that you learned from the program and used it in the moment?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Well there was, we have to look at a clock for about 60 seconds, but I don't have one of the revolving clocks so I'll take a stop watch and I'll just look at the little numbers inside.

JEANNE BLAKE: And that helps?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Yes.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's great. That's a great concrete example. Andre, you recently had a story about circumstances that you described in the newspaper, The Boston Globe, in Boston and something really nice happened as a result of your sharing your story. You wanted to mention that.

ANDRE ZAYAS: Yes. I walked into school and Mr. Dibrell, I think he's our Assistant Principal, he came up to me and said I have mail. I went in there not knowing what to think of it and I see there was an envelope and there was a check for \$100 in it. I'm a writer, I know how to write but as long as thank you's go, it was like one of the best things that's happened to me. I've never really gotten money for doing talking. It was a surprise but it was a good surprise because my birthday was next week.

JEANNE BLAKE: So you wanted to express your appreciation?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Yes, I would like to thank Jay Veeders because it helped me out. It bought me, I bought me some new sneakers because I desperately need them.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's great.

ANDRE ZAYAS: And if I'm going to need something I have it.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's great. So you're going to keep continuing the program?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Most likely because I have sports. I have homework I need to take care of that way. I could go on it life. I'll do the program, it's really helped me out and at the same time it will be kind of hard because I have so much stuff to do before.

JEANNE BLAKE: Rana there's evidence that if Andre takes the time, that the work, the stresses, that it's sort of counterintuitive, you think oh, I can't sit down for ten or twenty minutes and focus my thoughts but if he does, the benefit, he'll get more done according to the research?

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Yes. A couple things just to add. Andre's really at the beginning. We just did kind of an introductory session through Mr. Avila, the gym teacher and then we're going to

actually start this after school program so it was Peggy Kemp who really went after and got a grant for the Fenway High School for twenty sessions for the students so it's really just be two kind of quick sessions just to introduce them to. The fact that he remembers something from it is wonderful. I think oftentimes whether it's the faculty or the students, people feel like, I don't have ten or twenty minutes a day. I've got so much going on. Andre has extracurricular activities, he's helping out his family, he's got a lot going on to take out ten or twenty minutes and one thing with the Relaxation Response of course it's great to have a foundational practice of twenty minutes a day, but also just taking a minute can really help you. To answer your question, just even focusing on your breathing for 60 seconds before you start to do your homework can help you focus your thoughts and put you in one place and actually you get more done than when you know you're really feeling stressed and your multi-tasking. Are you on facebook at all?

ANDRE ZAYAS: Myspace.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Myspace, facebook and so a lot of students are on myspace, facebook and at the same time IM'ing and then they're doing their homework so we're really a multitasking society.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's right.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: What taking a minute can do for you is just keep you in the focus and keep you single tasking so you can actually get more done.

JEANNE BLAKE: So I like that you remembered that one minute trick and I hope that you will keep using it Andre. Thank you for coming and for sharing a bit of your story and I hope that things ease up for you and if not I hope that this program helps you manage all of the things that you are juggling in a more effective way.

ANDRE ZAYAS: Thank you.

JEANNE BLAKE: We'll be right back with Channel and hear her experience with this program at her high school.

BREAK

JEANNE BLAKE: We continue our discussion now with Channel Peguerro joining us to talk about how she is benefiting from the Education Initiative at Fenway High School in Boston as well. Channel welcome.

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Thank you.

JEANNE BLAKE: So let's get right to it. You also have been in this program for a month. Why did you decide to partake?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Well, I have a lot of stress on me because I have to get my work done. I have to take care of my little brother because I'm the oldest and I thought that this program could help me relax more like concentrate on some of the things because there's times when I can't concentrate on anything.

JEANNE BLAKE: And have you found it to be helpful?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Yes, I did.

JEANNE BLAKE: Can you describe that?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Well in one of the sessions that I had she told us to concentrate on our breathing so that we could get our mind focused on doing stuff so sometimes when I'm doing homework I just take a moment and breathe so I can concentrate so that I'll be more focused on my homework, get it done quicker and be able to do anything else I want.

JEANNE BLAKE: So how, I know it's not easy to describe, but after you take that minute for yourself and you've concentrated on your breathing, how do you feel different?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: I feel that I'm not that tense anymore like if I'm stressed out anything you'll do will probably tick me off and then when I'm more calm and cool you could just, it wouldn't bother me as much.

JEANNE BLAKE: Rana help us. That was a great description. Help us understand physiologically what's happening.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: So the Relaxation Response is the physiological opposite of the stress response so when we're stressed out, our blood pressure's increasing, our oxygen consumption's increasing, your metabolism's increasing and what we're doing with different forms of relaxation she's talking about diaphragmatic breathing is just bringing our body back to a balanced state. So that's what probably she's feeling.

JEANNE BLAKE: And you want to continue?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Yes. I heard that they are going to start doing after school programs and I'm looking forward to going to some of the sessions.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's great. Have you brought some of your friends into this?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Yes, I'm going to try to get them to go. I have a lot of friends so probably.

JEANNE BLAKE: Has anyone made fun of you for this?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: No.

JEANNE BLAKE: No. What would you want people to know about the stresses that young people are facing today if they don't quite understand? We asked Andre to take us into the world of a teenager today but a lot of people don't know that might be listening to the program.

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Well probably some people just think that us teenagers we just have a lot of fun, we do anything we want but really we have a lot of responsibilities and our parents give us a lot of those as well. Like, my mother, she wants me to get good grades so I can be able to go to college with a scholarship. That's a lot of pressure on me because if I go lower than a "B+" she's always on me like you need to get that higher so you can get the scholarship and then my little brothers they always need help with their homework so I need to help them. Just like there's a lot of stuff to do.

JEANNE BLAKE: It doesn't leave a lot of time for you. What advise would you give parents who, I hear this a lot from young people that parents are really, the pressures that parents are putting on young people is a big source of stress. What would you say to parents who are listening that are maybe putting a little bit too much stress on their kids?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Oh probably that, yes, okay they got a lower grade but encourage them a little more. It doesn't have to be like you have to do it, like okay you did this but try to do this more and if you need any help, I'll help you. Sometimes they just let you do it by your own self and they don't put any input in it.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Yes, I was just going to add I see often the same situation. Some parents are supportive, they want what's best for their student but they can be almost too much. There's a software product called, it's called PowerTool where parents can actually check on a daily basis, their grades and if the students are doing their homework. The original thought behind this software was to empower students to really take control of their life. If you are not doing your homework you're going to see how you arrived to this grade at the end of the semester. But I think some parents are taking it to the extreme. So that's very difficult.

JEANNE BLAKE: I just hear so much about this. I had a friend who absolutely prohibited her daughter from bringing anything home higher than a B because her daughter was so unbelievably stressed about getting into this college which she ultimately did by the way but she was just putting enough pressure on herself that her mother knew that she had to like really help her ramp it back a little bit. Would you have ever thought that something like this would have the effect that it's having when you first heard about it Channel?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: No, when I first heard I just thought oh, it's another class. It's not going to help for anything. It's a waste of time. But I guess I was wrong. It really did help.

JEANNE BLAKE: And it was worth the shot?

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Yes.

JEANNE BLAKE: And it's got to be really satisfying for you to see this work in the ever-pressured world that we're living in.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: It is. You can't really take away the stressors that the students are feeling.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's right.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: But these are tools that can add to them so at least it's something that when they're in a situation, when they have a lot of kids feel stomach anxiety. Try the diaphragmatic breathing. At least do something for yourself.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's right. Before we go I wanted to list some of the symptoms of stress because they can appear as a lot of other things and you might not identify as stress and I wonder if you might just list through some of those?

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Sure, I see with kids now a lot of migraines, headaches, a lot of shoulder tension, lower back aches.

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Can't fall asleep.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Yes, can't fall asleep. They have that real busy mind so they can't get to sleep at night or they're sleeping too much. Not eating at all or eating too much. So there's a lot of that extremes. Nail biting, some of the jaws clenching at nighttime. Depression. Real deep anxiety issues that we see. Unfortunately a lot of the things I'm seeing with our students now is what we're seeing in our adult population.

JEANNE BLAKE: I was just thinking that.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: It's not that different.

JEANNE BLAKE: There are very few of us that can't relate to some of those symptoms and I think it's just fantastic to be giving the tools to young people. These are tools that I imagine that you'll carry into your adult life as a way to handle life you know; I almost hesitate to say it – in a more efficient way. I mean I really wish that some of the stresses could disappear from all of our lives. I'm trying to eliminate some of those. I put down my iPhone, I have an iPhone. Put it down. Don't check my email. I don't check it while I'm driving but there are things that we can do in addition to being proactive in taking that moment or ten minutes or twenty minutes to breathe. So I want to thank both of you and Andre wherever you are for coming in to tell us about this program. The Benson Henry Education Initiative and Mind Body Institute at Mass General Hospital and thank both of you. Good luck, keep it up.

CHANNEL PEGUERRO: Thank you.

RANA CHADNOFSKY: Thank you for helping us.

JEANNE BLAKE: You bet. We'd like to thank you for joining us today. I'm Jeanne Blake.