

Thinking Time

June Sharp takes some time out

I was taught how to self-hypnotise by a clinical hypnotist years ago and it has always been part of my day. I call it Thinking Time.

When I used to call this 'me-time' self-hypnosis, I found it very difficult to explain to other people that I was actually quite alert with my eyes closed, as they thought they would be unable to reach me. It is just a method of closing down the physical side of things so that the mental part can concentrate in a relaxed way and there is nothing mysterious about hypnosis, as any medical hypnotist will tell you. There is no doubt that our present era is a stressful time, full of things to do. But there is only one sure way to fight stress and that is by doing nothing for a short time, a thing young people do not seem able to do. Over the years, I have learnt that all our mountains of tasks will get done, by employing some Thinking Time.

HOW TO START

Imagine yourself faced with several tasks which must be completed that day. The first thought is to throw up your hands in horror and say: "I'll never get all that



done." So wrong. Your first thought should be: "I can do it all, as long as I plan it in my mind." The initial requirement is paper and a pen. Jot down in list-form all tasks to be done. Then, prioritise them and say to yourself: "What will happen if I fail to finish my list?" The usual answer is 'nothing'. The main things will be done because there is always time for a few important tasks during the day. Also, the list technique means that there is a feeling of accomplishment, as items are ticked off. Many people are incapable

of saying 'no'. If we are halfway through something important and a spouse, partner, work colleague, parent or child comes to us and says: "Could you...?" the usual reply is: "Yes, of course." But life becomes more bearable and more orderly if we reply: "No, I'm afraid I'm rather busy just now." Back to Thinking Time. When I was a child at kindergarten, there was a time in the day when we were

encouraged to lean on our arms on top of the desk. That was my earliest Thinking Time and I realise now that it was a wonderful way to rest those childish brains. We had few tantrums in the class and no outbreaks of crying. How many times do you say to yourself: "This is all too much for me"? Yes, it is, if everything is done one thing after another, without rest. And busy people always say: "How can I stop in the middle of things to think for a while? It's just not possible." Sorry, but it is.

Thinking Time is particularly useful for older people who have memory problems. Have you ever said: "I'm sure I know that actor but I just can't remember his name"? If you stop thinking about him and direct your mind onto something completely different, or indeed onto nothing, the name amazingly comes back. If you fear that it will go away again, keep a pad and pen beside you — and use it.

During the day, if you have time, close your eyes and totally relax, going down the body from head to toes. (See my book, *Closed In... With The Symptoms of a Stroke*, published by Open Leaf Publishing at £7.99, www.ol-publishing.co.uk, ISBN: 978-0-95657-334-3-8). Calm, preferably instrumental, music in the background can be helpful. I suggest that you think about one special item or place, then Thinking Time becomes meditation. Visualise what you have been doing earlier in the day, then plan what you will do later and tomorrow. This means that this information is firmly established in your mind and when Thinking Time is over you will do each task in rotation, just as you planned. If it is necessary,

once again make a list. You cannot make too many lists. This form of winding down is particularly beneficial for anyone who has problems getting to sleep, as you can feel pride in the number of tasks done during the

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day and feel efficient for planning the next day. I assure you, it will help you to go to sleep. After a round of housework (which I am convinced is more exercise than going to the gym) a woman can feel totally exhausted. As well as sitting down with a cup of coffee or tea, take some Thinking Time. Even ten minutes with eyes closed and muscles relaxed will do a great deal for your energy levels. It is always a good idea to tell the rest of the family that you intend to take some Thinking Time and under no circumstances do

you want to be disturbed. At first people will think you are sleeping and it is entirely up to you whether you tell them you are merely in total relaxation mode.

PUT THINKING TIME INTO YOUR DIARY

Just as you would mark down any appointment, I am convinced that Thinking Time should be in there as well. Make a note to talk to yourself! Every day, my husband and I take a siesta after lunch. This has been done by Europeans forever but our version is Thinking Time. Sometimes, one of us will nod off, if the morning has been particularly strenuous and this is fine, if needed. But, mostly, it is a time when we plan our afternoons and go over the morning's activities to check whether we could have done more or less at that time. There are very few lives which don't have a spare quarter of an hour which can go down into the diary on a regular basis. And Thinking Time is so important that it should be part of everyone's day, every day.

Photo: Three generations enjoy some 'thinking time'.