

Chapter 8 -- *Taking Action*

Dear reader: Please don't be disconcerted by references below to earlier chapters or characters from my *Reduce Your Body Age* book. What follows here fully provides you the step-by-step guidance of our Four-Week Start-Up Program ... for making significant lasting change in your stress, lifestyle or work life. Do you remember Garry, the chain store manager who worried all the time? As you may recall from Chapter 5, Garry regularly fretted himself out of relationships and jobs—as well as most of life's pleasures.

Four weeks into the body age program, Garry was no longer obsessing over his concerns. In fact, he noted that since he had stopped worrying so much, he felt as if someone had added four hours to his day. By the end of the program, Garry had shed 11 years of body age, testing a year below his calendar age of 38. And his appearance age was 33, down from age 45. As one observer noted, "He looks like someone lifted the weight of the world off his shoulders."

Garry accomplished this transformation by sticking to the prescription for his dominant and secondary stresstypes—worry wart and drifter. Chief among the anti-aging skills Garry learned was relaxation, which he discovered at the first training session. You can read about how Garry did this at the end of the chapter. Meanwhile, we want to tell you what awaits you in the rest of the book. Part I of *Reduce Your Body Age* provided you with important information about yourself. Part II is a detailed look at the anti-aging techniques that participants in our body age study found most effective. Each person practiced the techniques best suited to his or her stresstypes, mastering one skill at a time.

Each chapter in Part II fully explains one of these skills and suggests ways for you to put it into practice. At first, as you follow the prescription you've written for yourself, you'll find the skills simply bring increased vitality. But if you're like most of our study participants, one morning you'll wake up to find that you have become a stress master.

Before you can make this leap, you must examine your conscience. You know what your prescription is, but are you honestly prepared to reserve sufficient time to follow it? For the next four weeks you'll need to set aside an average of 20 to 30 minutes a day. Remember, the smallest change makes a big difference. But be realistic about what you can tackle. Attempting too much, too quickly, is a sure prescription for failure.

Many of the anti-aging techniques yield immediate results. The first time you successfully perform a relaxation exercise, for example, you'll emerge refreshed and energized. Along the way, however, there may be some discomfort as well, particularly at the beginning. If you're starting to exercise after a long sedentary period, you'll probably suffer some temporary aches and pains. As your style of communication becomes more assertive, you may have to deal with resistance in others, who are used to the old you. All of our study participants encountered roadblocks such as these. It helps to realize they are signs you are trying on new behavior—and succeeding.

Your friends and family may find themselves changing too. In the early stages of the program, the husband of a participant commented that it was hard for him to adjust to the new person his wife

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was becoming. As it happens, the program was a success for both of them. Gradually, they gained the courage to communicate more openly than they had in many years. “For the first time since the early days of our marriage, we both know we’re living with a real flesh-and-blood person,” our study participant commented. “But it took a little adjusting.”

Any change involves uncertainty. Like Garry, who found he wasn’t sure what to do with his new-found time, you’re bound to experience a certain amount of bewilderment—as well as excitement—as you introduce new behavior. But if you concentrate on making small, concrete modifications, you’ll keep the uncertainty to a minimum.

One, Two, Three . . . Begin

To make things easy, we’ve divided the learning process in each chapter into three stages. In “Rate Yourself,” we invite you to take stock of your strengths and weaknesses in order to identify opportunities for change. Then we help you develop clear images of yourself doing, feeling, and looking better. In “Basic Training,” we explain how the intervention works and teach you the specific skills you need to put it into practice. In the “Start-Up” section, we provide you with a four-week program to get you off on the right foot.

We’ve found that working within a structure is the most certain route to successful change. Rather than plunging in and trying to do everything at once, we suggest you learn the techniques slowly, spending four weeks acquiring each anti-aging skill. And we recommend that you don’t start phasing in the second intervention of your prescription until about the eighth week of the program. This provides time for you to become comfortable with your new abilities—and for the stress of the first series of changes to subside.

Keeping a Diary

Even if you’ve never had a diary, we recommend you keep one during the program, to help you define your goals and track your progress. You’ll find a diary can be both a powerful incentive for change and a source of great support.

Our program participants kept weekly journals, divided into two parts. First, they wrote down their target behavior for each week. They followed this planning section with a record of progress toward their goals. A sample of this sort of action diary is on page 105. In Appendix A, we’ve provided blank forms you can copy for your own journal. You might want to keep them in a loose-leaf notebook.

Before you fill out a planning page, we recommend that you give each commitment the SMART test. SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, truthful. For each goal you set, ask the following series of questions:

Is it specific? What is it? How will I do it? Where? When?
With whom? For how long?

Is it measurable? Will I know when I've done it?

Is it acceptable? Will I feel good about doing this?

Is it realistic? Am I really able to do this?

Is it truthful? Do I really want to make this behavioral change?

As you sit down to fill out your planning pages, remember to not be too hard on yourself. You should set achievable goals. We've provided space for up to five new behaviors each week, but you may want to try only one or two in the beginning. Also, be prepared to be flexible and to modify your contract if it proves too difficult or if a better opportunity for change emerges.

On your progress recording page, learn to give yourself credit for things you are already doing well. Unfortunately, most of us have a tendency to discount or downplay our successes. Instead, give yourself positive feedback every step of the way. This is essential to spotting opportunities for change and overcoming roadblocks. Be gentle with yourself about shortcomings and mistakes—keep in mind that you are attempting to change habits built up over a lifetime. Don't expect to become a new person overnight.

One speed freak reported that at first he viewed the feedback part of his contract as “namby-pamby, self-congratulatory back patting.” He did it, but he thought it was a total waste of time. By the third week of the program, however, the man reported, “I'm beginning to pace myself in long meetings, saving my energy for the items I'm really responsible for. I realize I've been able to do that from time to time in the past, but I didn't recognize it—how I did it or how good it felt—until I started giving myself feedback in my diary. Now, at least I recognize when I do pace myself well, and what a tremendous skill it can be. I guess my usual feedback to myself was 98 percent critical. Now that I'm celebrating my successes, I firmly expect I'm going to have more of them.”

Action Diary for Week 8th to 15th Planning Page

Affirmations (my self-themes for this week in key words and phrases)

I am smooth energy
I feel my stress signs and let them go
(Other) I flow like a cat

Opportunity Visualizations (I clearly see myself . . .)

-breathing away my stress
-maintaining a relaxed posture while others get tense
-keeping my "Stress tachometer" in the green zone until I really need the energy

I choose to deepen this vital life skill as follows (my specific behavioral objectives this week)

I choose to: Listen to the autogenic CD and repeat my affirmation for 5 minutes on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday & Sunday

Under the following circumstances: In the guest bedroom while Jim prepares breakfast with sign on door "Danger Mom Meditating"

I choose to: practice the Spiral Relaxation for 5 minutes once per day, everyday

Under the following circumstances: With my door closed just before I make my "return phone calls" at 2:00 p.m.

I choose to repeat at least one of my favorite affirmations as many times as I feel comfortable (each workday)

Under the following circumstances: As I walk at a slow flowing pace from bus stop to our home (remember it's the kids' house)

I choose to _____

Under the following circumstances:

My other opportunity situations for skill practice are:

- preparing for Friday's staff meeting (spiral)
- responding to boss's question
- dealing with kids' questions as I prepare dinner

I have arranged to check in with my partner . . .

When?

Tuesday & Saturday
around dinner time

About

My "Stress Tachometer"
read out - her getting religious about
going to the gym (she told
me to be merciless)

Progress Recording Page

Vital life skills being mastered: Relaxation

	<u>Congratulations on vital actions</u>	<u>Opportunities for doing it better</u>
Monday	– listened to CD – “spiraled” my way through phone calls	Wasted energy writing angry memo I didn’t send
Tuesday	–ditto plus affirmation – relaxing walk from bus	felt guilty and tense because I hadn’t bought junk food for kids snack
Wednesday	Kept cool when photo copier broke down	
Thursday	– Cancelled a useless meeting –still doing CD	over-reacted to Jimmy’s after school snacking
Friday	– fielded boss questions with no headache afterwards	one too many (ouch) before dinner drinks
Saturday	– CD and affirmation are becoming a habit –Kids respect my sign	
Sunday	positive solution to kids’ argument; I didn’t take sides just to end it	I really could have left that brief case at the office

My summary of progress at end of week (Have any patterns emerged?
Does my self-care contract require modification?)

The Buddy System

Making a weekly contract with yourself and recording your daily progress doesn't mean you should undertake the program alone. On the contrary, you'll need the support of a partner, perhaps someone also working on the program.

In our body age study, we asked everyone to choose a buddy. Buddies agreed to monitor each other's progress on a regular basis, preferably at least once a week. Monitoring was sometimes as simple as a phone call at a previously agreed upon time, but in many cases it also included regular meetings.

Two of our program participants, Charlie and Tony, used the buddy system to particular advantage. Charlie, a dermatologist whose key stresstype was speed freak, had progressed quickly in the first couple of weeks of the program. By the end of the third week, however, he proved unable to achieve one of his aims—building brief breathing spaces into his ten-hour days at the office.

When he told his buddy about his difficulty, Tony had an idea. He suggested Charlie ask his nurse to schedule at least three fictitious patients sometime during the next week. Charlie would use this time to do things that had nothing to do with work and would report back to Tony at week's end. Initially, Charlie admitted, he felt angry with his nurse each time she scheduled blank time. He had to fight the temptation to see the next patient early. But, remembering his pact with Tony, he resisted the impulse. Soon the fictitious patients became part of Charlie's weekly routine. At his 8-month checkup, Charlie joked, "Well, at least one of my patients follows the prescription I give him, . . . me."

Tony, a dentist who had tested as a loner, also benefited from the partnership. He commented that Charlie had been a "real sounding board for all the good advice I should have been following." During the program, he had asked himself, "Why should Charlie bother to change, anyway?" This reminded him of one of his own basic values, one that had caused him to become a health professional in the first place: "To be of value and service to others."

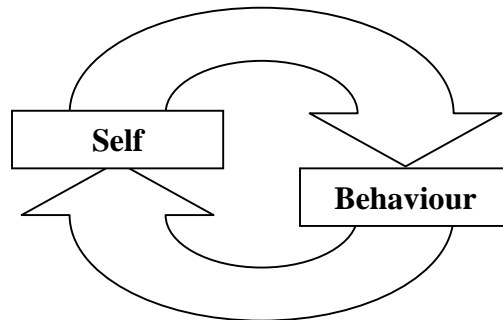
Remembering his ideals led Tony to realize he wanted to become involved in public service, rather than simply be paid to help people. As a result of clarifying his values, Tony joined the local Rotary chapter. At his 8-month checkup he reported that he had found "more friendship time" in the past 6 months than in the previous 15 months. And it had all started with his buddy, Charlie. In addition to finding a buddy, you'll also want to prepare those around you for some of the changes you'll be making. If you have a family, enlist their cooperation—it could make all the difference. For example, nutritional changes will be difficult if others at the dinner table aren't willing to cooperate. When you decide to acquire a new behavior that will affect them, find subtle ways to alert your family, friends, and co-workers.

Change: The Amazing Force

In recent years, psychologists have come up with various theories to explain the process people go through when they undergo significant change. They all seem to agree on one point: Simply choosing to change makes you feel different—and better. This improvement in attitude then helps you to alter your behavior. Modifying behavior modifies your image of yourself—which in turn helps you change further. Doing is becoming.

To a great extent, your emotional makeup at any point in time stems from the way you have seen yourself in the past. If you have typically considered yourself successful and in control, you bring this image of yourself into the present moment. Very likely you will create it again and again. If, however, you have usually viewed yourself as falling short of your own expectations and those of other people, you will behave in ways that reinforce this belief.

Self~Behaviour Cycle



Fortunately, self-image is not cast in concrete. Every week, you are presented with hundreds of opportunities to behave differently. Recognize and seize just one or two of these “choice points” each day, or each week, and the resulting change in your self-image and self-esteem will astonish and please you.

Imagine, for example, that you are in your office and the phone rings. The person on the line, perhaps your boss, has a pressing request for information. Your instinct is to rush to respond. You put the caller on hold while you frantically search through your files for the desired nugget, all the while fretting about keeping this busy person waiting, occasionally interrupting your search to go back to the phone to apologize for taking so long, dropping the file on the floor as you try to do three things at once, rapidly bringing yourself to a boil. By the time you have found what is wanted, you need a two-week vacation.

Now imagine an alternative. When the request comes in, you say, “I’ll give it my immediate attention and call you back in fifteen minutes.”

The hundred such choice points in your working day may now go by largely unnoticed. But once you start paying attention, each one is an opportunity to see yourself as either a driven dog or a

person who is in control. With each choice you make, you create yourself anew—and the self you make is up to you.

Establishing a cycle of positive behavior takes about three weeks. In this brief period, new conduct becomes a self-reinforcing habit. In effect, your body age program is a series of small, concrete changes that become habitual.

Rooting Change Deep inside the Mind and Body

The foundation of change for many of our body age participants was a technique we call autogenic, or self-generated, training. Once you learn it, it will help the rest of your prescription for change become as natural as breathing. In fact, autogenic training has the power to actually alter your neural pathways as you change your behavior. As this happens, practicing the anti-aging skills stops being a matter of discipline. Rather than saying firmly to yourself, “I must do this because it’s good for me,” you will find yourself thinking, “I choose to do this because it expresses who I am and the way I want to be.”

Those familiar with the Japanese martial art of karate will understand what we’re talking about. In karate, as you move up the ranks from white to green to brown belt, progress is primarily a matter of perfecting a series of rigorous techniques. But the black-belt karate master has gone beyond this. He is free of techniques: They have become part of his way of being. In a similar fashion, autogenic training will ultimately free you from technique.

The method combines a particular form of relaxation with two mental processes: affirmation and visualization. Autogenic relaxation is a kind of self-hypnosis that enables you to root positive phrases and mental images in your unconscious. It brings your mind and feelings into harmony with your body as you take on and adjust to new behaviors.

You may recall that in Chapter 2 we explored some of the mounting scientific evidence of the power of the mind and emotions to heal the body. Autogenic training taps into this extraordinary power. Those participants in the body age program who consistently used autogenic relaxation combined with affirmation and visualization showed greater and more lasting progress than those who used them little or not at all.

All three of the techniques that make up autogenic training arise naturally from your deepest self. Any one of them can be used effectively on its own. Each can help your prescription take firm root in your personality, so that new approaches to life quickly become natural. Used together, the three techniques are powerful forces for change. In fact, we concluded that autogenic training was so important that it ought to be part of all five interventions.

Autogenic Relaxation

The foundation of the process is autogenic relaxation, which helps the two sides of the brain operate in synchrony. Modern man is primarily a creature of the left half of the brain—logical, analytical, verbal, and time-conscious. For most people, intuition, inspiration, and imagery—properties of the right half—come into play when the body is at rest. During deep relaxation these

two parts of your brain function together, unleashing vast creative potential. Numerous experiments also suggest that increased mental capacity results from deliberate use of relaxation.

Autogenic relaxation involves using breathing and focusing techniques to enter a state somewhat like a hypnotic trance. For our study participants, we developed a relaxation CD and asked them to use it at least four times a week during the program. The script for the CD appears below.

Use your CD each time you practice autogenic relaxation. Find a comfortable, quiet place, where you will not be interrupted for about half an hour. Be sure you can sit or lie down comfortably. Ask a friend who has a pleasant reading voice to record it in a calm, even tone. The speaking portion should be paced to last about 14 minutes. We have provided time indicators to help the reader monitor his or her speed. If no reader is available, record the script yourself. You may find that it helps to partially or completely turn the bass up and the treble down when you play the CD. Or if you prefer, you can purchase the autogenic CD from the Institute at www.stresscanada.org/books.html

A Script for Relaxation

(Reading time: approximately 14 minutes)

Autogenic relaxation is one of the most effective exercises for achieving a physically relaxed and mentally alert state.

By focusing your mind on the instructions, you will be able to experience comfortable feelings of heaviness, warmth, and deep relaxation in every part of your body.

And with each time you practice, it will become easier and easier to relax whenever you choose.

Begin by lying on your back or by sitting comfortably in a chair.

Become aware of sounds inside the room and outside, and allow yourself to be separate from them.

Allow thoughts to come and go.

[1 minute]

As I count from 5 to 1, picture each number as clearly as you can. By the time I reach 1, you will notice that your thoughts are becoming quieter, more distant, and less distracting.

5 . . . , 4 . . . , 3 . . . , 2 . . . , and . . . 1.

Focus your attention on the tip of your nose. Notice that the air on the inhalation is slightly cooler than the exhalation. And with each exhalation, notice how the tension you don't need continues to leave your body.

Let go of all physical, emotional, and mental tension.

[2 minutes]

Give yourself permission to enjoy this time for your relaxation.

By focusing on the instructions, your mind becomes more and more calm, as your body becomes deeply relaxed.

Inhale now, and bring the air down into your abdomen. Let your abdomen expand, and then the chest. And exhale through your nose.

[3 minutes]

Once again inhaling and filling the abdomen more and more, let your chest expand as you continue inhaling.

Then pause and exhale, releasing tension you don't need on the exhalation.

This time, inhaling slower and deeper, feeling the abdomen expand, and then the chest. And notice the comfortable fullness. Pause, and then exhale slowly.

And continue breathing in this way, consciously allowing the breathing to become slower and deeper.

Once again, inhaling, filling the entire body, and pause, and when you exhale, release all tension from your body.

[4 minutes]

And on the next inhalation, put your awareness on the feelings in the muscles in the abdomen and chest, feeling them expand and tighten. And then, release and relax.

Slowly inhaling, and slowly exhaling.

Breathing in now, and inhaling fresh air, let the air into the lungs, and let it pass into the bloodstream, bringing nourishing, healing oxygen to every part of your body. And exhale.

[5 minutes]

Now, with a slow, comfortable, deep breath, breathe in light air, and let it spread throughout your entire body. When you exhale, the lightness remains behind.

With your next inhalation, the body becomes even lighter. And on the exhalation, the lightness remains.

This time inhaling, and consciously taking the light air through your nose, into your arms, to the tips of your fingers, and into your head. Now, into your chest, and abdomen, and down your legs to

the tips of your toes. And when you exhale, your body feels so light, you feel as if you are almost floating.

[6 minutes]

Now inhale, and breathe in heavy air. Let it spread throughout your body. Feel yourself sinking comfortably into the chair or the floor.

When you exhale, let the heaviness remain.

With each inhalation, allow your body to be more and more comfortably heavy and relaxed.

Your mind is clear and focused. And it becomes clearer as your body becomes more relaxed.

Feel the pull of gravity now all over. Imagine and feel yourself being drawn comfortably down into the earth. Feel the pull of gravity across your entire body.

[7 minutes]

Now imagine wearing a heavy suit of clothing. Feel it on your chest . . . and stomach . . . and abdomen. Feel the heaviness on your back and shoulders.

Imagine and feel a heavy belt around your waist.

Feel the heaviness in your arms, and repeat to yourself: My arms are very heavy. And feel your arms becoming even heavier. Even your hands are wearing heavy gloves.

[8 minutes]

And now, feel the heaviness of your clothing across your hips, thighs, calves, and feet.

Your whole body is very heavy . . . and very relaxed.

Now, with your awareness on your chest, repeat to yourself: My heartbeat is calm and regular. My breathing is deep and even.

And with your awareness on your stomach, imagine and feel warmth on your stomach. Imagine, perhaps, a comfortable warm heating pad. Imagine and feel warmth, and repeat to yourself: My stomach is relaxed and warm.

[9 minutes]

Say to yourself, "I feel warm . . . and relaxed . . . and calm."

Your entire body is warm and comfortable.

And as I count from 10 to 1, allow yourself to move into a deeper and deeper state of relaxation. Picturing the numbers as I count . . . And when you get to 1, your body will be even more relaxed, and your mind will be even calmer.

[10 minutes]

10 . . . , 9 . . . , 8 . . . , 7 . . . , deeper and deeper . . . ,
6 . . . , 5 . . . , 4 . . . , 3 . . . , 2 . . . , and 1.

Become aware of how every part of your body feels, and know that you can return to this state whenever you choose.

Now enjoy this time for your relaxation . . . as you silently repeat your affirmations . . . and rehearse your visualizations.

[note: Leave at least five minutes of blank CD space at this point, or record five minutes of low-volume, relaxing background music. After this interval, complete the autogenic CD as follows.]

Now, as you begin to come back to an alert and awake state, you will find yourself rising up like a bubble to the surface of a pond as I count from 1 to 20. When you open your eyes, you will feel very relaxed and alert.

[11 minutes]

For the rest of today you will continue to be very alert, and focused. You will notice your body's stress reactions, and let them go.

Tonight you will sleep well, and wake up tomorrow alert and self-confident. And this state of well-being will improve day after day.

Counting up now, 1 . . . , 2 . . . , 3 . . . , 4 . . . , 5 . . . , 6 . . . , 7 . . . , 8 . . . , 9 . . . , 10 . . .

[12 minutes]

. . . more and more awake . . . 11 . . . , 12 . . . , 13 . . . ,
14 . . . , 15 . . . , coming up to the surface . . . 16 . . . , 17 . . . , 18 . . . , 19 . . . , and . . . 20.

[14 minutes]

Positive Affirmations

You will note that toward the end of the CD we allow five minutes of silence for you to practice the rest of the autogenic technique while you are in a deeply relaxed, highly suggestible state. This technique involves affirmation and visualization, two potent tools for change.

Like most people, you probably carry on a continuous internal dialogue with yourself. For roughly 80 percent of us, this conversation is self-critical, consisting of blatantly negative phrases or more subtle devaluations. Negative chatter of this sort depletes self-esteem.

If your interior monologue is negative, you are probably eroding your own self-confidence. Examples of negative self-talk are: “I can’t do this.” “I’m inadequate.” “I have a feeling I could have done this better.” Hedging is a subtle variation on negative communication with yourself. Phrases such as “Yes, but . . .” and “That may be so, but . . .” are sure signs of its presence.

On the other hand, if you communicate with yourself in a positive manner, your outward behavior will likely follow suit. This self-affirming behavior will influence all parts of your life, including your relationships with other people. Affirmations themselves are words or phrases you choose to express your values in a highly positive form. These expressions emphasize process and state of being rather than result. For example, before a competition, a weight lifter might choose to repeat to himself an affirmation such as “I am strength.”

Coming up with the right affirmation is like being your own advertising copywriter. It involves finding a slogan that captures what you are trying to accomplish or how you wish to act at a given point in time—without highlighting the goal. It would be counterproductive, for example, for the weight lifter to use “I will lift 500 pounds” as his affirmation.

Effective affirmations have key characteristics. Generally, they begin with the pronoun “I,” which implies that you are taking full responsibility for the statement. They are also devoid of any negative connotation: “I am strong and confident” is much better than “I am overcoming my weaknesses.” Simple, declarative sentences in the present tense are most forceful. The statement “I eat nutritious food,” for example, is more powerful than “I will eat nutritious food.” It states your intention as if it were already a fact, emphasizing process rather than result. In short, you are what you affirm.

Below we provide a range of examples, dealing with the different aspects of your life.

36 Self-Affirming Phrases

Personal and Interpersonal

- I am a good person.
- My spouse, friend, relative (use names) is a good person.
- I understand and appreciate others (use specific names) more every day.
- I accept myself as I am.
- I choose to love and be loved.
- I enjoy life fully.
- I use the past and the future to enhance the quality of my present.
- I contribute to humanity through the joy I bring to my work and social life.
- I feel strong and clear, alone and with others.
- I can feel critical of others and still accept them.

Career

- I am happy and effective in my work.
- People enjoy paying me for what I enjoy doing.
- I open myself to create solutions.
- All mistakes are forgivable.
- I forgive myself and others for mistakes and unkindnesses.
- I now communicate clearly and effectively, with one or with many.
- I accept setbacks along the road to success and achievement.
- I remain calm and balanced in my work.

Stress Efficiency and Anti-aging

- I feel alive and vital every day.
- Health, happiness, and well-being are mine.
- I relax at will.
- I breathe pain away with every breath.
- I sleep easily and soundly.
- I am losing weight and gaining beauty.
- I eat fresh, healthy foods.
- My joints are flexible and comfortable.
- My body is quickly cleansing out all congestion and weakness.
- I choose to breathe fresh, healthy air. (Good for smokers.)
- Full breathing relaxes and satisfies me more than alcohol.
- I choose actions that express me, now and in the future.
- I eat well and eliminate well. (Good for constipation.)
- I run relaxed and give my all. (Substitute any sport.)

Philosophical and Spiritual

- I am becoming more aware of the pattern of good in my life.
- I am happy and blissful just to be alive.
- Everything now is as it should be.
- I find God in everything I think and sense and do.

You may or may not find the right affirmations for you in the list above. We'll be suggesting many other possibilities in the following chapters. The important thing is to identify expressions that feel appropriate and try them out.

Repeat these phrases to yourself several times throughout your day, as well as during the autogenic relaxation sessions. You may, as some people do, say them each morning as you face yourself in the mirror. Try adding a warm and sincere smile or nodding and saying, "You bet!" to yourself. Or

you may, as one of our study participants did, tape an affirmation to your wristwatch so that you are reminded of it when you check the time.

Find a method that's right for you. You may feel a little awkward when you first voice one of these advertising slogans for your better self, but if you persist, you'll find they work.

Visualization

Visualization means using mental imagery to rehearse for success. This can be as simple as picturing yourself engaging in whatever behavior determines success for you.

The power of visualization has been demonstrated by professional athletes. In fact, some studies show that time spent visualizing success can be more productive than time spent in physical practice. This is because the brain perceives mental pictures as actual events. Visualizing a perfect performance can bring you much closer to that goal.

Olympic figure skater Brian Boitano once described his use of mental imagery as daydreaming. Indeed, visualization is a kind of deliberate, creative daydreaming. It certainly worked for Boitano—he went on to win the gold medal in the 1988 Olympics.

Just as impressive is the mounting evidence that mental imaging techniques can help combat disease, a fact we mentioned earlier in this book. Among other researchers, Carl and Stephanie Simonton are well known for their use of visualization with cancer patients. In their book *Getting Well Again*, they describe the remarkable recovery of the first patient they worked with, a 61-year-old man with serious throat cancer who was undergoing radiation therapy. He could barely swallow his own saliva, his breathing was labored, and he had dropped from 130 pounds to 98 pounds.

The Simontons recommended their patient try three short relaxation sessions each week, followed by a series of visualizations. He was to picture his cancer vividly in whatever form it seemed to take. Then he was to visualize his radiation therapy as millions of tiny bullets of energy that would hit all cells in their path. Cancerous cells would die, while normal ones survived. Two months after commencing treatment with the Simontons, the man showed no signs of cancer. By the time their book was published, he had remained healthy for six years.

None of our study participants was suffering from a serious disease such as cancer, but many discovered the power of mental imagery.

Using Autogenic Training to Improve Athletic Performance

At the University of Toronto, we tested the effectiveness of autogenic training on a group of weight lifters and runners. For both types of athletes, results were impressive.

Over a period of six weeks, weight lifters who regularly practiced autogenic relaxation, affirmations, and visualizations increased the number of pounds they could bench-press by more

than 12 percent. Those who engaged in physical training alone showed an improvement of only 2.2 percent.

Runners demonstrated a similar pattern. Those who routinely used the three phases of autogenic training improved their speed in a ten-kilometer race by 3 minutes, 39 seconds. Those who relied only on physical training increased their speed an average of 8 seconds.

How to Use Autogenic Training

Your entire body age program—regardless of which anti-aging skills you are working on—begins with the three-part autogenic training. Use your CD each time you practice the relaxation phase. Find a comfortable, quiet spot, turn on your CD, and relax.

At the end of the CD introduce your affirmations. These are the themes you are planning to bring to life in the coming days. You may choose phrases from the list we provided earlier in the chapter or devise your own. You may practice one or several at a time. Your affirmations will change throughout the program as you move on to new stages.

We also recommend that you include at least one general anti-aging affirmation. Here are some possibilities in addition to the affirmations we listed earlier: “I use stress energy efficiently.” “My body renews itself each day.” “I am youthful health.” “I am vital energy.” “I flow smoothly.”

As you move on to visualization, remain in a fully relaxed state with your eyes closed. This is your chance to do some creative daydreaming. Now that you have achieved the heaviness and warmth of autogenic relaxation and have reflected on your affirmations, your mind and body are ready to receive mental images of success.

Visualization is most effective when it is specific and includes details of all your senses—smell, taste, sight, sound, temperature, and texture. The more you experience a visualization as if it is really happening, the more powerful and lasting will be its effect. Remember: Your mind makes no distinction between a visualization and a real event.

Here is the basic technique.

Feel the warmth and heaviness of your body while experiencing your mind as calm, clear, and aware. Imagine yourself in a specific situation in which you would like to function more effectively or in which you would like success to be the rule, not the exception. The details will depend on the intervention you are applying. Mentally rehearse how the highly successful you would naturally express yourself under these circumstances. Visualize the scene exactly as you want it to be. Throughout, you are calm, relaxed, in control, and deriving great personal satisfaction from your behavior. Repeat the scene in your head until all the details are clear and you have involved as many of your five senses as possible.

Now, affirm your visualization. Perhaps employ a phrase using the following form: “In this situation, this is how I am.” For example, “When I talk to my father-in-law, I feel calm and confident. I listen to him fully without interrupting.” If the scene you have been visualizing

involves someone who you often feel is negative, you might say something like, “I see the pluses in this person.” As a result, you will start to see the person’s positive attributes and to spot opportunities you otherwise might have overlooked.

Finally, feel the satisfaction of having achieved your goal. Savor the feeling. Continue your visualization until the voice part of the CD begins again. It will bring you back to your normal, awake state. Once the CD is finished, take your time before getting up. Let the mood of success linger. Feel the power of the affirmations and visualizations flow through your bloodstream and permeate the cells in every part of your body.

Devising a Plan for Success

The three-part technique we’ve just described is a powerful tool for planting the seeds of success in your psyche. If you use it faithfully, it will increasingly become a part of you, a natural expression of your inner self, as natural as breathing. It will smooth the road to success in all your other efforts.

You should practice your affirmations and visualizations each time you enter a state of autogenic relaxation. They are most effective when you are in this calm condition. You may want to gradually expand the amount of time you allow for affirmations and visualizations.

Autogenic relaxation was at the root of many of the changes that Garry, the chronic worrier, accomplished. If you recall, worry was aging Garry far beyond his years. Garry’s distress was evident during his initial interview. Leaning forward in his chair at a 45-degree angle, he answered questions quickly and expansively, always trying to appear highly motivated. He was anxious to impress us with everything he had read—which was a considerable amount. The likelihood of Garry dropping out of the program seemed high. Our prognosis was that he would set unrealistic goals and then use his failure to achieve them as an excuse for leaving.

Garry’s prescription was to focus first on relaxation, then on clarifying goals and values and improving communication. Garry took to relaxation like a fish to water. Even before the training period was complete, he was using the autogenic CD regularly. It made him so relaxed, he said, that even though he knew “he should get up and begin worrying,” his “body didn’t want to.” At first, of course, this early success provided Garry only with new material for concern. He complained that the CD was too powerful and fretted that he couldn’t decide on the best time to use it—morning, lunch, evening, or some other time of day.

At this point, one of the women in Garry’s training class interrupted him with a suggestion. She recalled that in the initial training session Garry had described his anxiety as a “whirring inside.” She suggested that for Garry the best time to relax was whenever he felt the whirring feeling. And she proposed an ingenious visualization: Garry should visualize the “whirr” as “WRRR,” and imagine that the letters were a code for “Worry-Relax.”

Garry got the message. He loved rituals, so he gladly added this one to his contract with himself and recorded it in his action diary. In one stroke he turned his worst enemy—his obsessive and mechanistic response to any troublesome event—into his greatest ally.

In the first month, Garry was so successful at relaxing instead of WRRRRing that he missed the worry just as a reformed chain-smoker misses cigarettes. Freed from the shackles of care, he discovered endless unfilled hours. To fill in the gap, he began to worry that so much relaxation was preventing him from concentrating on his elusive goals in life, especially finding the right career. Clearly he was now ready for the next intervention, values/goals clarification. In the second month, as Garry got in touch with his core professional values, he was shocked to discover that his first career as an economics teacher at a junior college—six jobs ago—had provided more opportunities for self-expression than anything he'd done since.

But the new, more relaxed Garry didn't follow true to his old form: He didn't quit his current job and go straight back to teaching. Instead, he bided his time, examining various options. He saw that there were many aspects of his current job that he valued. By the time he contacted some friends who had remained in the academic world—putting some new-found communication skills into play—he was prepared to design a teaching job that would be right for him.

In the fourth month of the program, Garry approached the dean of business at his old junior college and proposed two new courses on starting and managing small retail businesses in the high-tech area. Too quickly for Garry to worry, the dean offered him a job beginning the following fall semester. Garry accepted and gave his current employer ample notice, staying on with the retail chain until just before classes were to start. In his spare time, he did background reading and wrote his course outlines.

Garry's eight-month checkup fell in August, just before his new job was to start. At this final interview, we asked Garry if the transition period had been disquieting for him. He replied that he hadn't found much time for worrying in the past month because he was so busy doing his day job, preparing for his fall classes, and becoming reacquainted with his old college friends. He did admit to wondering occasionally how his new-old career would go, but he was so busy either problem solving or enjoying himself that whenever he heard the WRRRRing sound, he would just get up and do something else.

Remarkable as it sounds, Garry's transformation was repeated over and over again by others in the program. The next five chapters contain a great deal of useful information and many suggestions for action based on their experiences. What you do with this resource is entirely up to you. You can follow our program to the letter, or you can ignore it and design your own timetable for Your Body Age and attaining greater vitality. As long as the motivation for change comes from you, you'll succeed.

You should also keep in mind the following three points. They are the body age program in a nutshell.

- 1. Plan for and make***
- 2. at least one small, concrete, realistic change each week***
- 3. rooted by autogenic training in your deepest self.***

It's now time for you to act on your prescription. Read your primary intervention first. Then your secondary intervention. Then your third. Then start your program. The rest is up to you.