



HSE
Occupational Health & Safety
and Environmental Protection unit

Stress and simple relief techniques

Work Well Feel Well

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Medical Service

Stress

- **Natural Response :**

Stress is the body's natural response to a perceived threat or pressure. It can be triggered by external events (work situations or relationships) or internal events (thoughts or emotions).

- **Physical and psychological response :**

Stress manifests itself both physically (increased heart rate, muscle tension, etc.) and psychologically (anxiety, irritability, difficulty concentrating).

- **Types of Stress :**

- **Acute Stress :** An **immediate and temporary** reaction to a specific threat. It is generally short-lived.

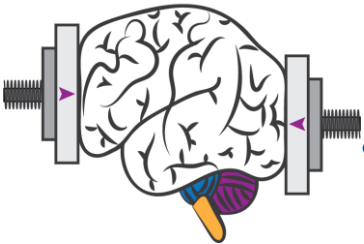
- **Chronic Stress :** A **prolonged and persistent** state of stress, often caused by constant or recurring situations.

Causes of stress

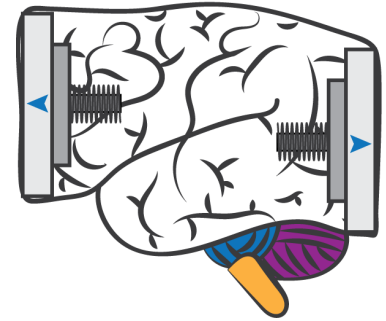
• External factors

- **Professional** : Work pressure, high workloads, tight deadlines, lack of support or recognition
- **Personal** : Relationship problems, family responsibilities, major life events (such as divorce or bereavement)
- **Environmental** : Difficult living conditions, noise, pollution, insecurity

External Stressors



Internal Stressors



• Internal factors

- **Thoughts and Emotions** : Fears, anxiety, pessimism, perceived lack of control
- **Personal expectations** : Perfectionism, high self-expectation
- **Physical Health** : Chronic illnesses, lack of sleep, poor diet

Consequences of stress

- **Physical consequences**

- **Body Systems**

- Affects the cardiovascular system (hypertension, heart disease), immune system (reduced immunity), and digestive system (gastrointestinal disorders).

- **Sleep**

- Insomnia, poor sleep quality.

- **Psychological consequences**

- **Mental Health**

- Anxiety, depression, burnout

- **Behaviors**

- Avoidance behaviours, irritability, reduced motivation, procrastination...

- **Social consequences**

- **Relations**

- Tensions in personal and professional relationships, social isolation.

- **Performance**

- Reduced productivity, frequent errors, reduced satisfaction at work and in personal life.

The importance of self-assessment

The mental health continuum

	Healthy	Reacting	At risk	Critical
SIGNS	Calm and steady	Occasional anxiety or sadness	Persistent anxiety or sadness	Excessive anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts
	Sense of humour	Irritability or pessimism	Angry or cynical	Angry outbursts or aggression
	Mentally alert	Forgetfulness or intrusive thoughts	Indecision, poor concentration	Unable to concentrate
	Sleeping well	Difficulty sleeping	Sleep disturbances, nightmares	Significant sleep disturbances or oversleeping
	Performing consistently	Feeling overworked or procrastinating	Feeling overwhelmed, poor performance	Unable to complete work tasks
	Confident in self and others	Self-doubt	Distrusts others	Excessive distrust
	Feeling good	Tension or headaches	Persistent physical symptoms	More serious physical symptoms
	Good energy levels	Low energy	Fatigue	Exhaustion
	Physically active	Reduced physical activity	Physically inactive	Lethargic
	Socially active	Reduced social contacts	Avoiding social contacts	No contact with loved ones
	Substance use is occasional and social	Substance use is regular but controlled	Substance use is difficult to control	Substance abuse or dependence
	STRATEGIES	Maintain current activities	Recover: slow down and rest	Acknowledge the need for action
Practice mindfulness		Build mental health toolkit	Recover: eliminate non-essential tasks	Reach out to peers or someone you trust
Cultivate social relationships		Identify problems	Reach out to peers	Consider a leave of absence from work
		Act on things that can be changed	Maintain contact with loved ones	Rekindle close relationships

Mechanisms in action

Fight or Flight

The “Fight or Flight” response is a physiological reaction to a perceived threat, preparing the body to flee or fight.

- Triggered by the sympathetic nervous system.

- **Goal:**

- Maximize bodily resources to face imminent danger.

- **Physiological reactions :**

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Dilated pupils
- Reduced digestive functions

Psychological implications of the Fight or Flight response

- **Emotional Reactions :**

- **Anxiety and Fear**

The perception of threat activates intense emotions, often associated with anxiety and fear.

- **Hypervigilance**

Increased attention to potential threats, leading to a constant state of alert.

- **Behaviors :**

- **Avoidance**

Tendency to avoid situations perceived as dangerous, which may limit daily activities.

- **Aggressivity**

Combative response to threats, which may manifest as irritability or interpersonal conflicts.

4 simple techniques to relieve stress in the workplace

Cardiac coherence

Step 1

Breathe more slowly and deeply (about 4-5 seconds in, 4-5 seconds out).

Step 2

Focus your attention on the heart area. Imagine your breath moving in and out of your heart or chest.

Step 3

Activate a positive feeling. Try to experience a truly regenerative feeling, such as appreciation or attention for someone or something in your life.

4 simple techniques to relieve stress in the workplace

Physiological sigh

1st inspiration

Take a deep breath through your nose, filling your lungs to about 80% of their capacity.



2nd inspiration

Immediately after the first breath, take a second short breath to fill your lungs completely.

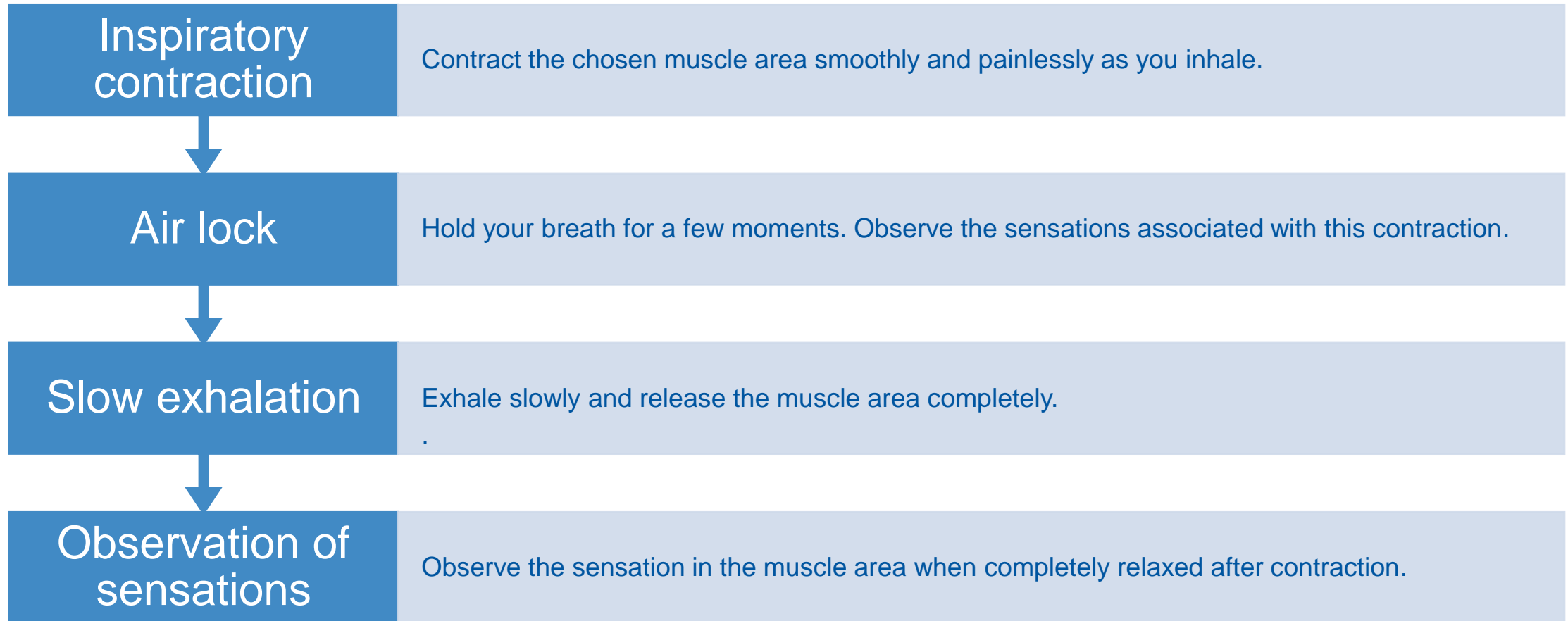


Slow exhalation

Exhale slowly and completely through your mouth.
Release all tension by blowing gently, as if through a straw.

4 simple techniques to relieve stress in the workplace

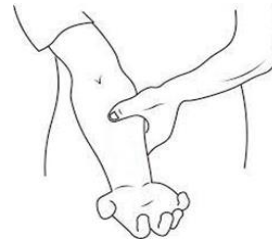
Muscular relaxation



4 simple techniques to relieve stress in the workplace

Self-massage

- Set of short exercises
- Can be used everywhere and by everyone
- Freedom to choose exercises, practice time or number of sets
- Relieves and prevents muscular tension (RSI), promotes well-being, reduces stress



All videos soon available on the medical service website



<https://hse.cern/MentalHealth>



www.cern.ch