

## HOW TO DO PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION TRAINING

- Slowly squeeze one muscle group (see progression below)
- Squeeze to a point of maximum tension, never to a point of pain.
- Hold the muscle tightly for 10 - 15 seconds
- Notice the feeling and location of the tension.
- Slowly and gradually let go of the tension in the muscle.
- Notice how the muscle feels as you releases the tension. Look for signs of increased lightness or heaviness, warmth or coolness, tingling.

## PROGRESSION (SKIP ANY MUSCLE THAT IS INJURED)

- Squeeze the hand into a fist. Repeat with opposite hand.
- Bend the right arm at the elbow; bring it up to the chest.
- Repeat with left arm.
- Extend both arms out in front reaching as far as you can.
- Tilt head back towards the ceiling.
- Tilt head forward the chest.
- Lift shoulders up towards the ears.
- Lean chest forward, shoulders back and arch back.
- Push stomach out making it hard.
- Squeeze buttocks tightly together.
- Press knees together.
- Point toes towards the ceiling.
- Wrinkle your forehead.
- Shut eyes tightly closed.
- Press lips together and smile widely.
- Clench teeth.

## POSITIVE THINKING

- Positive thinking is giving you the go-head to succeed. The main idea is to develop an attitude of challenge, commitment, and control toward the inevitable changes of life. Creating a positive mind-set can take practice, but some of the following techniques can help you on your way.

- Self Talk means telling you what you can and can't do. Positive self-talk is saying, "I can," and setting your mind to meet the challenge at hand.
- Rehearsal is away to prepare for a potentially stressful situation before it occurs. Think over the situation go over the details, plan to take action, and visualise yourself proceeding successfully.
- Developing an action plan can help you turn a stress disaster into a new opportunity. Always make an alternate plan. Just in case the one you rehearsed doesn't plan out.

## VISUALISATION

Clearing your mind is a sort of "mental retreat". Well, visualisation can be taught of as a mental vacation – a license to daydream. You can produce feelings of relaxation simply by using your imagination. Unlike clearing your mind, where you try to focus on one single image, visualisation allows your imagination to run free. Try to visualise yourself feeling warm, calm, and relaxed. Picture a tranquil setting that has particular appeal you and try to imagine all of the details. Are you lying on a warm beach? How does the sun felon your back? Do you hear waves lapping on the sand? Is there a fragrance in the air? Just by using your imagination, you can give yourself a mental vacation whenever [and wherever] you feel the need to take a moment to relax and enjoy life.

- Careline 1800 409388
- Samaritans NI 08457 909090
- Samaritans 1850 609090
- AWARE 1890 303302

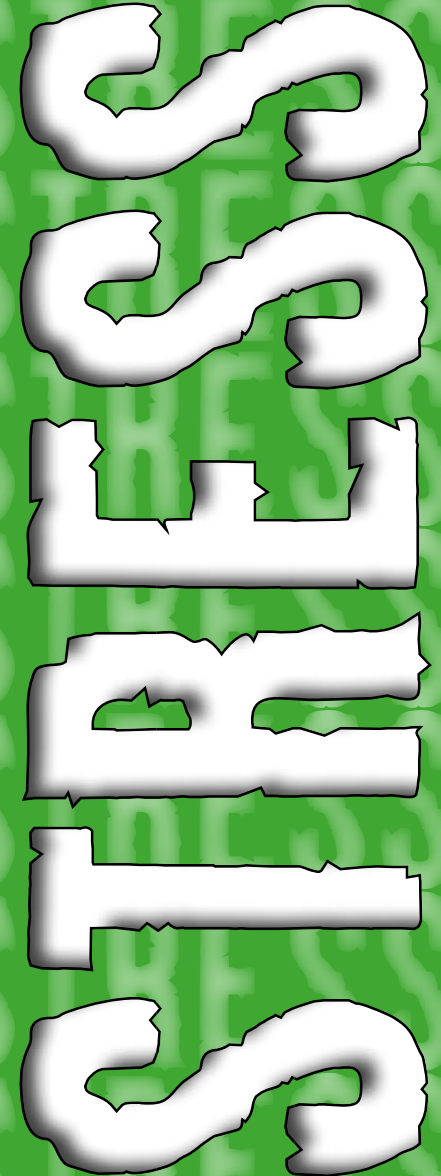
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## STRESS CONTROL FOR LIFE

Each person must assume the primary responsibility for his or her own stress control.

No doubt, the Defence Forces can help to reduce stress in our personnel. However, no stress programme can be more important than the individual's own efforts.

### 1. DIET

Poor diet and eating habits compromise performance, stamina and stress tolerance. Some substances intensify stress reactions. Limit or avoid caffeine, alcohol, refined sugars, fats and excessive salt.

### CAFFEINE

- Elevates blood pressure, heart rate, and the body's need for oxygen.
- Stimulates the cardiac muscle and central nervous system.
- Increases anxiety, sleeplessness and irritability.
- For less stress lighten up on the caffeine.

### ALCOHOL

- Negatively impacts performance, behaviour, judgement, and physical condition.
- Reduces the level of vitamins B and C in the blood and makes it more vulnerable to stress and disease.
- Suppresses rapid eye movement (REM) sleep that is vital for our ability to process traumatic experiences.
- If someone needs substance to manage stress, they also need professional assistance.

### 2. EXERCISE

- Increase muscle strength, lung capacity, blood flow and stamina.
- Lowers blood pressure, weight, stress chemicals and cholesterol levels.
- Improves sleep and self-confidence.
- Reduces the potential for injury during a mission and may limit the severity of the injury should one occur.

## EXERCISE TIPS

- Choose enjoyable activities.
- Follow doctor's advice.
- Use proper equipment.
- Warm up and stretch muscles.
- Graduals build up of activity intensity and duration. Train, NOT strain.
- If exercise causes pain, stop and get checked.
- Exercise 30 minutes every day.
- Walking only a mile a day reduces the risk of cardiac disease.

### 3. SMOKING

- Please stop, if you never smoked do not start.
- Nicotine intensifies a stress reaction.
- Nicotine depletes vitamins C and E and makes the body more vulnerable to stress-related diseases.

### 4. POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE

- Stress is a challenge to be controlled and overcome.
- We have the powers to manage our stress. We think, categorise, remember, visualise, find humour and make decisions.
- Be flexible and do not take daily life too seriously.
- Find humour in difficult situations.
- Emotions should serve and not dominate us.
- Good thinking controls emotions.
- Do not jump to conclusions; get the facts.
- Avoid the distortions of self-blame and guilt.
- Admit mistakes and learn from them.
- Think first; do second.
- Get distress only about the important stuff.
- Stand tall; avoid pettiness; be a leader.
- Never do anything that would shame your unit, your family or yourself.
- Your conscience is a good guide.

### 5. SPIRITUALITY

- A personal belief system is effective in stress control.
- People with a belief in a power beyond themselves cope with higher levels of stress for a longer time.
- Prayer, meditation and religious ceremonies are important for health.

## 6. RELAXATION

- Not the same as rest.
- Deliberate, purposeful quieting of the mind and body.
- Body chemicals produced by relaxation neutralise stress chemicals.

### DEEP BREATHING

This effective relaxation technique can be performed virtually anywhere and at anytime. Here are some simple steps

Start with 3 very deep breaths as follows:

- Bring in the very deepest breath possible. Hold it for 1 or 2 seconds and release it over 8 seconds.
- Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth.
- Pause for 5-10 seconds between each deep breath, breathing normally while resting.
- Relax the body as much as possible as you take the very deep breaths.

Proceed to 3 deep breaths.

- These are smaller in volume (about one-half of a very deep breath).
- Inhale through nose and hold for 10 seconds.
- Continue to relax the body.
- Exhale forcefully through the mouth.
- Rest and breathe normally between breaths.

Finish with 3 normal sized, full breaths.

- Inhale through the nose. Hold for 10 -15 seconds. Exhale forcefully through the mouth.

### PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

In progressive muscle relaxation, muscle groups are tensed for a few seconds and then relaxed. The tension "fools" the brain by signalling a too tense condition and relaxation chemicals released by the body counteract the tension. Progressive muscle relaxation is a three-step technique. First, you tense a muscle and notice how it feels; then you release the tension and pay attention to that feeling; and finally, you concentrate on the difference between the two sensations. This exercise can be done while sitting or lying down, and only takes about fifteen minutes. It helps if you can practice the technique in a quiet, relaxing atmosphere.