

Managing Stress at University

Tools for Success

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**Spolufinancováno
Evropskou unií**



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Stress

= strain, pressure, tension

"the body's response to internal and external processes that reach such levels that they overload the body's physiological capacities" (Basowitz)

"an internal state of a person who is threatened by something or expects such a threat, and whose defense against these influences is not strong enough, or whom the person concerned believes to be insufficiently strong"
(Křivohlavý)

Stress

Acute stress

- short-term (minutes, hours, days)
- one-time
- mostly harmless
- temporarily intense
- sudden onset
- increased alertness
- situational stressors

Chronic stress

- long-term (weeks, months, years)
- mostly harmful
- risk factor for health problems and burnout
- cumulative
- fatigue and exhaustion
- situations of prolonged stress

Stressors

*influences/factors triggering stress responses

psychological

social

life events

acute stress

recent argument

presentation at school

running for the bus

heavy lifting

job interview

chronic stress

challenging studies

unhealthy lifestyle

problematic relationships

long-term dissatisfaction

health issues

physical-chemical

physiological

Life Stress Inventory (Holmes, Rahe)

EVENT	VALUE	EVENT	VALUE
Death of a spouse or partner	100	Son or daughter leaving home	29
Divorce	73	Trouble with in-laws	29
Marital separation	65	Outstanding personal achievement	28
Jail term	63	Spouse begins or stops work	26
Personal injury	53	Starting or finishing school	26
Marriage	50	Change in living conditions	25
Fired from work	47	Revision of personal habits	24
Marital reconciliation	45	Trouble with boss	23
Retirement	45	Change in work hours, conditions	20
Changes in family member's health	44	Change in residence	20
Pregnancy	40	Change in schools	20
Sex difficulties	39	Change in recreational habits	19
Addition to family	39	Change in religious activities	19
Business readjustment	39	Change in social activities	18
Change in financial status	38	Mortgage or loan under \$10,000	17
Death of a close friend	37	Change in sleeping habits	16
Change to different line of work	36	Change in # of family gatherings	15
Change in # of marital arguments	35	Change in eating habits	15
Mortgage or loan over \$10,000	31	Vacation	13
Foreclosure or mortgage or loan	30	Christmas season	12
Change in work responsibilities	29	Minor violation of the law	11

150-200 points - group moderately vulnerable to stress influences
 200-300 points - group at risk of stressful influences
 over 300 points - at risk group

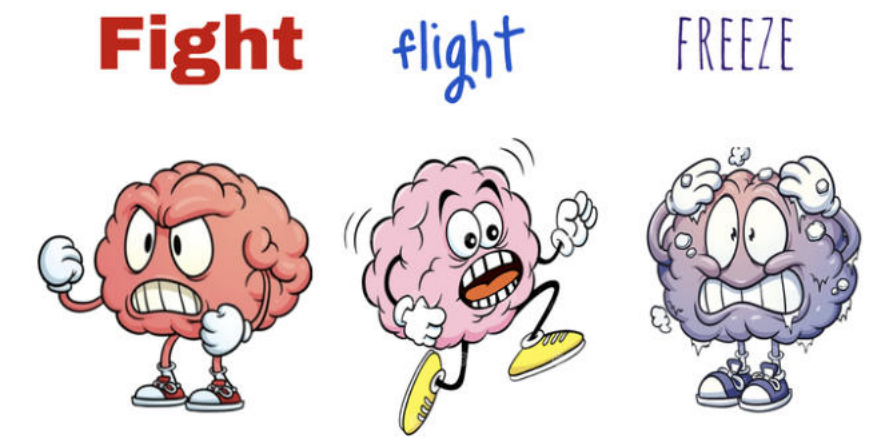
Factors influencing stress perception

- **stress is subjective**
 - prenatal stress
 - early life experiences
 - personal assessment of stressful situations
 - assessment of one's own capabilities (time, financial, social, etc.)
 - experience in coping with stressful situations (family, school, etc.)
- **the environment in which we experience stress**
 - support x loneliness
 - understanding x trivialization

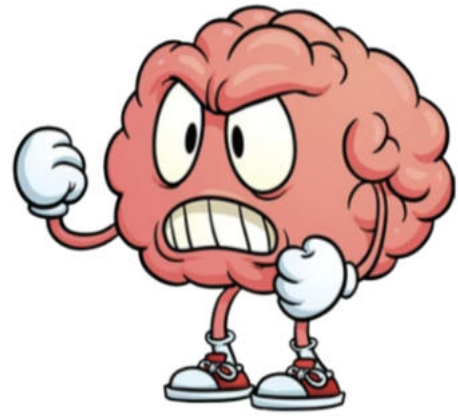
Stages of Stress

1. Alarm Phase

- experiencing a stressful situation
- “**fight or flight**” or “**freeze**” response
- activation of the **sympathetic nervous system**
 - increased heart rate and blood pressure
 - increased breathing
 - blocks stomach activity
 - muscle contraction
- **adrenaline hormones** are released into the bloodstream from the adrenal glands, providing energy to the heart, muscles, and brain



Stress response in everyday life



FIGHT

aggression
explosive behavior
irritability
controlling
making demands
narcissism
resentment



FLIGHT

workaholism
anxiety, panic
perfectionism
obsessive thoughts
procrastination
restlessness
hyperactivity



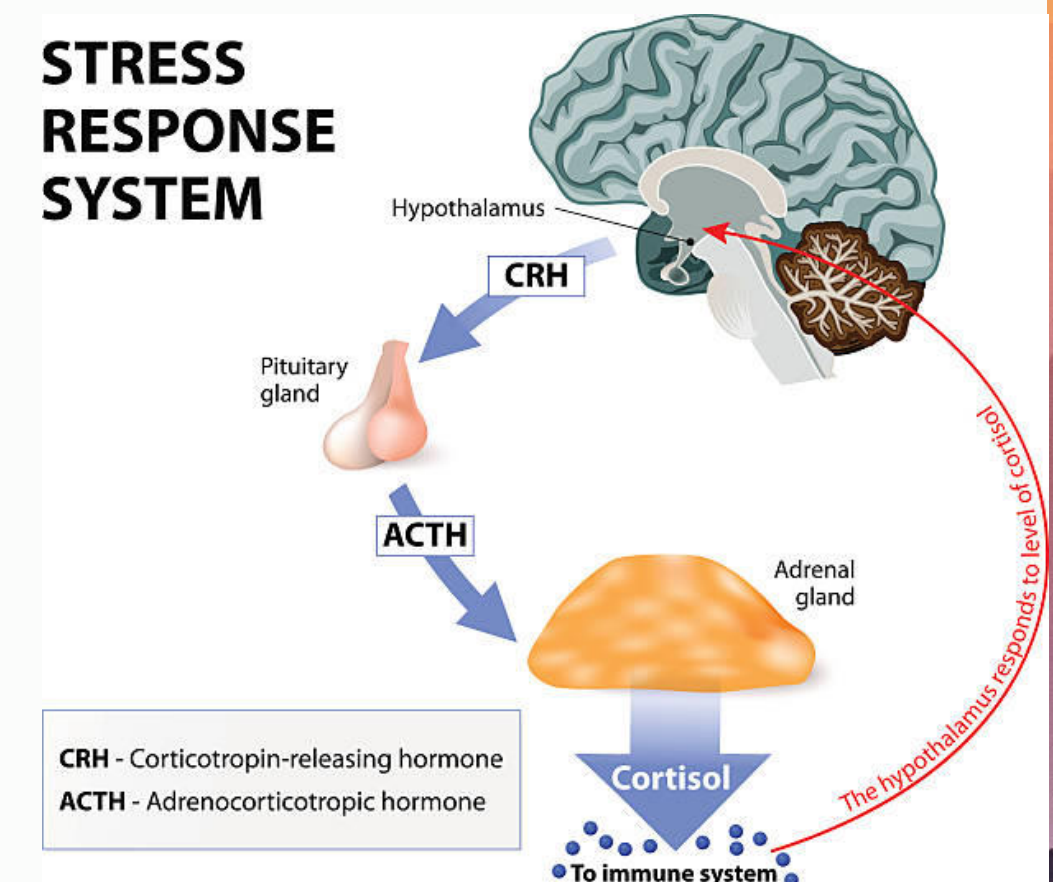
FREEZE

disconnecting
isolation
daydreaming
feeling stuck
unresponsiveness
indecisiveness
apathy

Stages of Stress

2. Resistance Phase

- exposure to stress factors over a long period of time (weeks, months)
- **effort to resolve the situation, cope with it, adapt to it**
- increased activity of the pituitary gland > adrenal cortex > **cortisol is released** (suppression of immunity) > blood glucose levels increase > energy gain to cope with stressful situations
- in case of stress resistance, return to rest mode

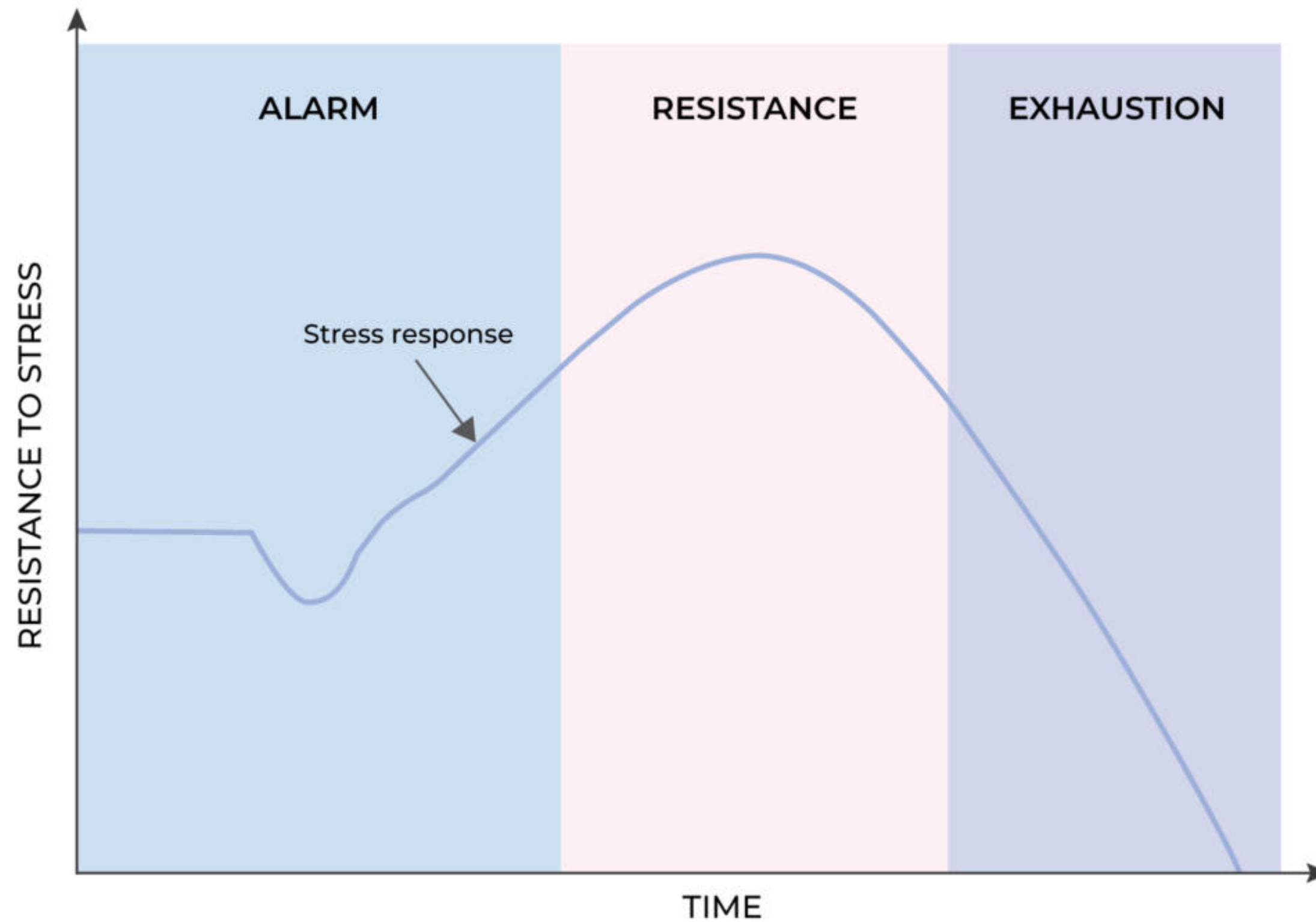


Stages of Stress

3. Exhaustion Phase

- this stage is the **result of prolonged or chronic stress**
- occurs when **the organism no longer has the means to adapt** to the excessive situation that has arisen
- exhaustion often leads to **pathological conditions**, the **development of diseases**, and **pathological changes in the body**

Stages of Stress



The effects of chronic stress on health

- cardiovascular disease
- digestive tract disorders (e.g., irritable bowel syndrome, stomach ulcers, or gastroesophageal reflux disease)
- weight gain/obesity
- weakened immunity
- hypertension
- muscle tension, headaches, migraines
- sleep disorders
- burnout syndrome, anxiety, depression, etc.

Stress management

Them: "I heard LAVENDER relieves stress & calms anxiety"

Me:



Stress management

- quality **sleep** and **rest**
- **eating** habits
- **exercise**
- **social support**
- cognitive strategies
- **hobbies** and interests
- self-care
- **time management** and priority management
- nature observation
- **relaxation techniques**



Relaxation techniques

- relaxation/release – **the opposite of the defense mechanism of fight, flight, or freeze**
- physical relaxation leads to mental relaxation
- **activation of the parasympathetic nervous system**
 - reduction in the activity of the sympathetic nervous system
- enables the body to **regenerate** and **recover**
- has an effect on:
 - calming, improved performance, concentration, emotions, memory, falling asleep

Relaxation techniques

conditions

- suitable **position**
 - sitting with head supported, “chariot driver” or “Mexican loafer” position, lying on back
- quiet environment
- moderate temperature



Relaxation techniques

types

- bodywork
- breathing exercises
- visualization/imagination
- mindfulness
- meditation
- creative relaxation (painting, writing)

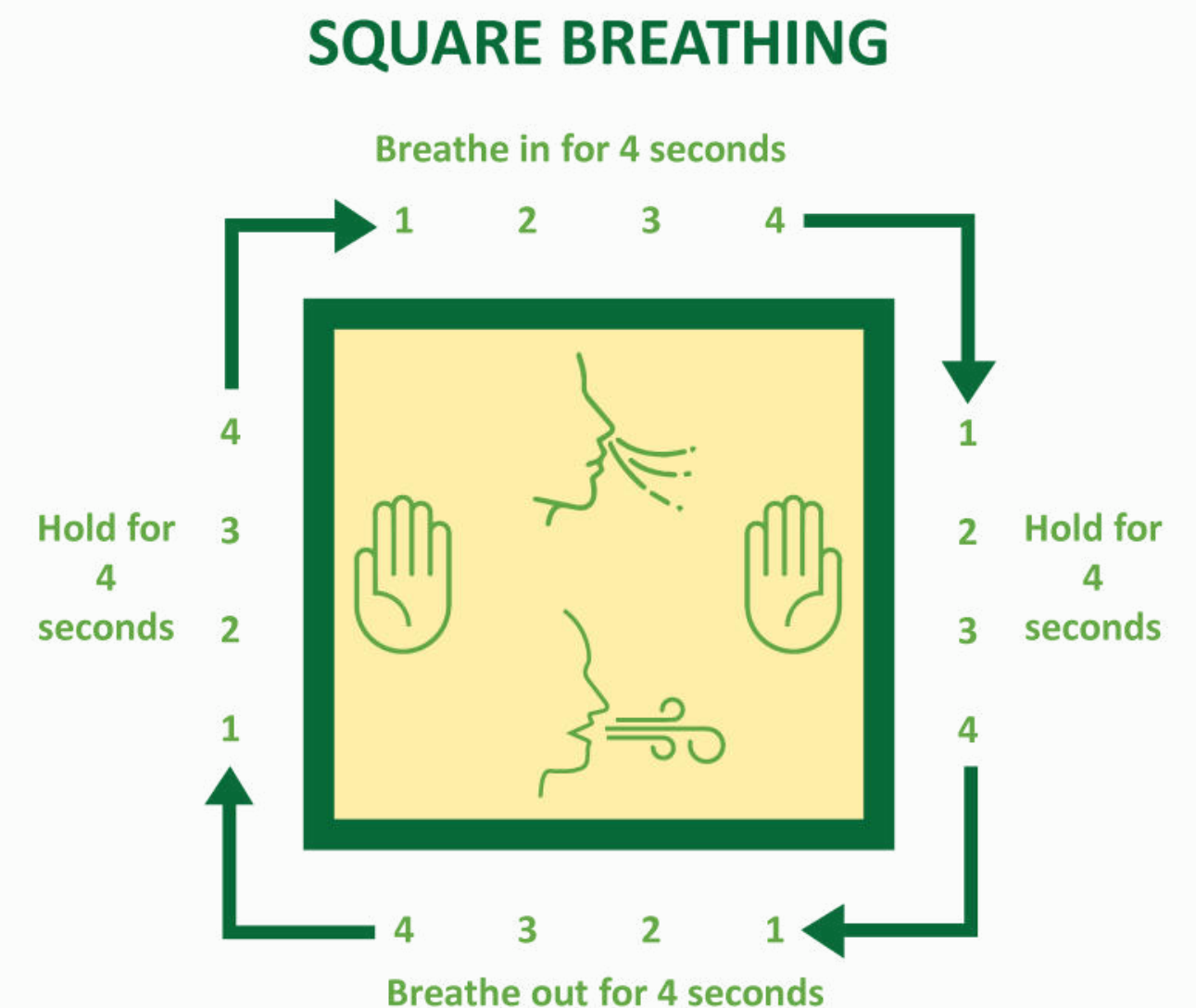
Breathing exercises

- **can be done anytime, anywhere, for any length of time**
 - before an exam, presentation, difficult interview, etc.
 - on the tram, in the library, in a shop, etc.
 - when you need to reduce stress, calm down, concentrate, or calm your mind
- **choose one or two exercises** and practice them
- practice and regularity are important
- start practicing in situations where you feel comfortable

Breathing exercises

1. Square breathing

- Take a deep breath through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- Exhale through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath again for 4 seconds.
- Repeat (5-15 minutes).
- Videos:
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF_1ZiFta-E
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJJazKtH_9I



Breathing exercises

2. 4-7-8 Breathing

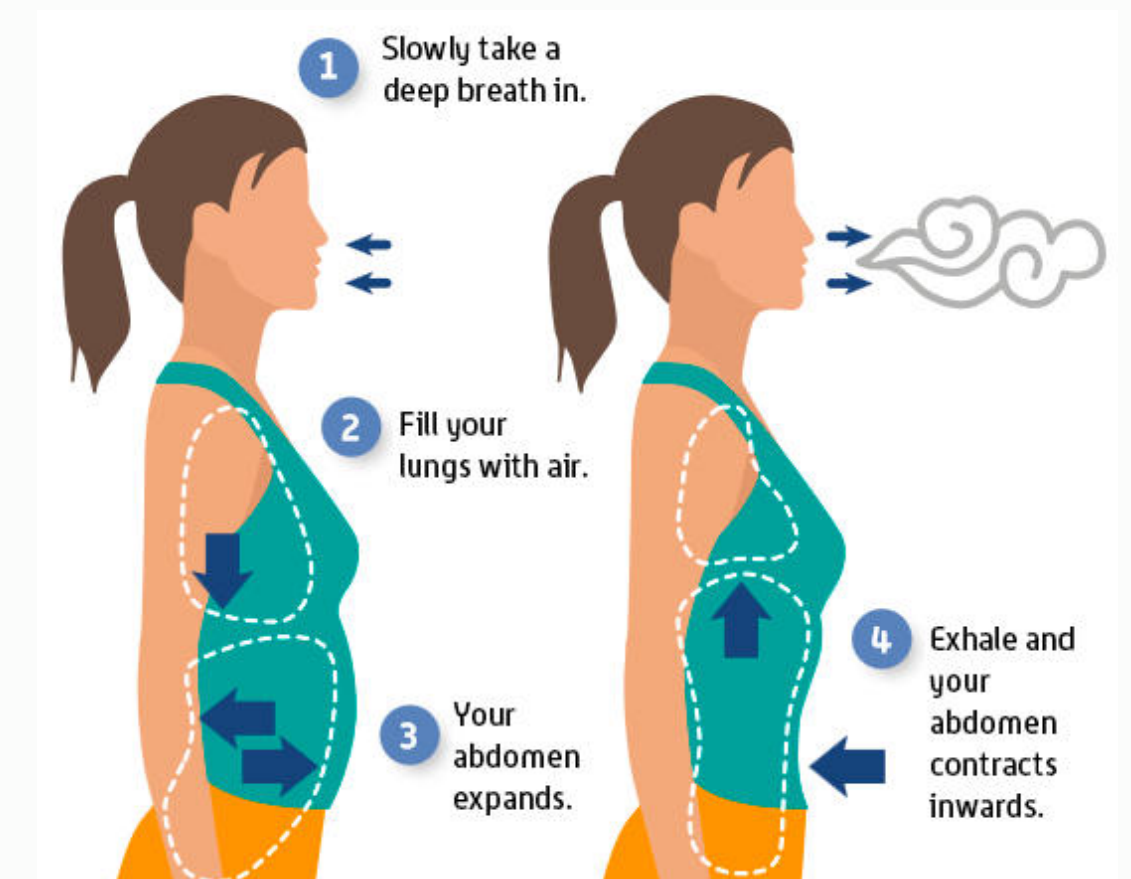
- **Breathe in** through your nose for **4 seconds**.
- **Hold** your breath for **7 seconds**.
- **Breathe out** slowly through your mouth for **8 seconds**.
- TIP: Shortened version of prolonged exhalation.
 - Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.
 - Breathe out through your mouth for 8 seconds.
- Video:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiUnFJ8P4gM>



Breathing exercises

3. Abdominal breathing

- Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.
- **Breathe in** through your nose, focusing on **expanding your belly** like a balloon while keeping your chest still.
- **Slowly exhale** and watch your **belly contract inwards**.
- Video:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXItOYOsLRY>



Breathing exercises

4. Alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodhana)

- **Close your right nostril** with your finger and **breathe in through your left nostril**.
- **Close your left nostril and breathe out** through your **right nostril**.
- Then **breathe in** through your **right** nostril, **close it**, and **breathe out** through your **left** nostril.

- Videos:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blbv5UTBCGg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l11qFpRqhIQ&t=129s>



The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

- useful during **stress, anxiety, panic attacks**
 - before exams, presentations
- Look around you and focus on:
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can touch
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste



Progressive muscle relaxation

- Duration: 15-20 minutes
- Alternate between **tensing and relaxing individual muscle groups**
 - 1. **Tense** the muscles for **5 seconds** – at the end of the inhalation
 - 2. **Relax** the muscles while exhaling and be aware of the relaxation for **10-15 seconds**
- videos:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=493mYfovYw0&t=201s>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClqPtWzozXs>

Visualization

- Visualizations that help us **deepen our mental peace**
- have **pleasant** and **calming content**
- the content of the visualization may vary, but it is important to always recall the visualization in detail
- for relaxation, it is possible to imagine a **favorite place, a meadow, a beach, a forest,** etc.

Mindfulness

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: intentionally, in the present moment, and without judgment.”

Jon-Kabat Zinn

- a skill that we can learn and cultivate
- enables us to be **fully aware of what is happening** in our bodies and what our senses perceive moment by moment
- enables us to **live our lives in accordance with our inner values**, rather than being controlled by emotions or impulsive behavior

Mindfulness of a daily activity

- Choose **one everyday activity** and give it your **full attention**.
- Notice **how you perform** this activity.
- Examples of activities: *brushing your teeth, showering, washing dishes, loading the washing machine, walking from room to room, drinking coffee/tea, etc.*
- The goal is to **be fully aware** of everyday activities so that we can perceive how life unfolds moment by moment, just as it is.

Mindfulness of a daily activity

Examples:

- Brushing your teeth:
 - What does your mind do when you brush your teeth? Pay careful attention to all the sensations associated with brushing: the touch of the toothbrush in your mouth, the taste of toothpaste, the moisture that accumulates in your mouth, the movements when you spit, etc.
- Showering:
 - Notice the temperature and pressure of the water hitting your body, but also the movements of your hand as you wash your body and the movements of your whole body as you turn, bend, etc. If you decide to spend some time planning or thinking while showering, do so with the clear intention that this is really what you have decided to focus your attention on.

Mindful walk

- During your **walk**, **be fully aware** and **notice what is happening around you**.
- You can focus on:
 - what you see around you (houses, cars, people, trees, animals, etc.)
 - sounds
 - smells
 - movements
 - the touch of your feet on the ground
 - the movement of your muscles while walking
- Notice what **feelings and emotions** are aroused in you by the things you encounter along the way.

Body scan

- consists of **gradually focusing attention on individual parts of the body** and the sensations in them
- attention is focused in a gradual sequence from the feet to the head or vice versa
- it is one of the most popular exercises
- it has a very positive effect on sleep

Creative relaxation

painting emotions

1. Notice how you feel, what emotions you are experiencing.
2. Close your eyes and ask yourself: if this feeling had a color, shape, form, weight, temperature, texture, what would it be like?
3. Draw this image on paper using colors, shapes, and lines.
4. Write down what the drawing looks like, whether it reminds you of anything.
5. Describe the drawing from the perspective of what it would be like if you were the drawing.

For example, “I am a drawing with lots of different shapes, I feel confused and distracted, I need more organization or peace...”

6. What can you take away from this, what have you learned about yourself?

Positive visualization

- The goal of positive visualization is to create a mental image of the desired course of events or goal.
- An idea of how you want the situation to unfold in every detail.

Positive visualization

Instructions

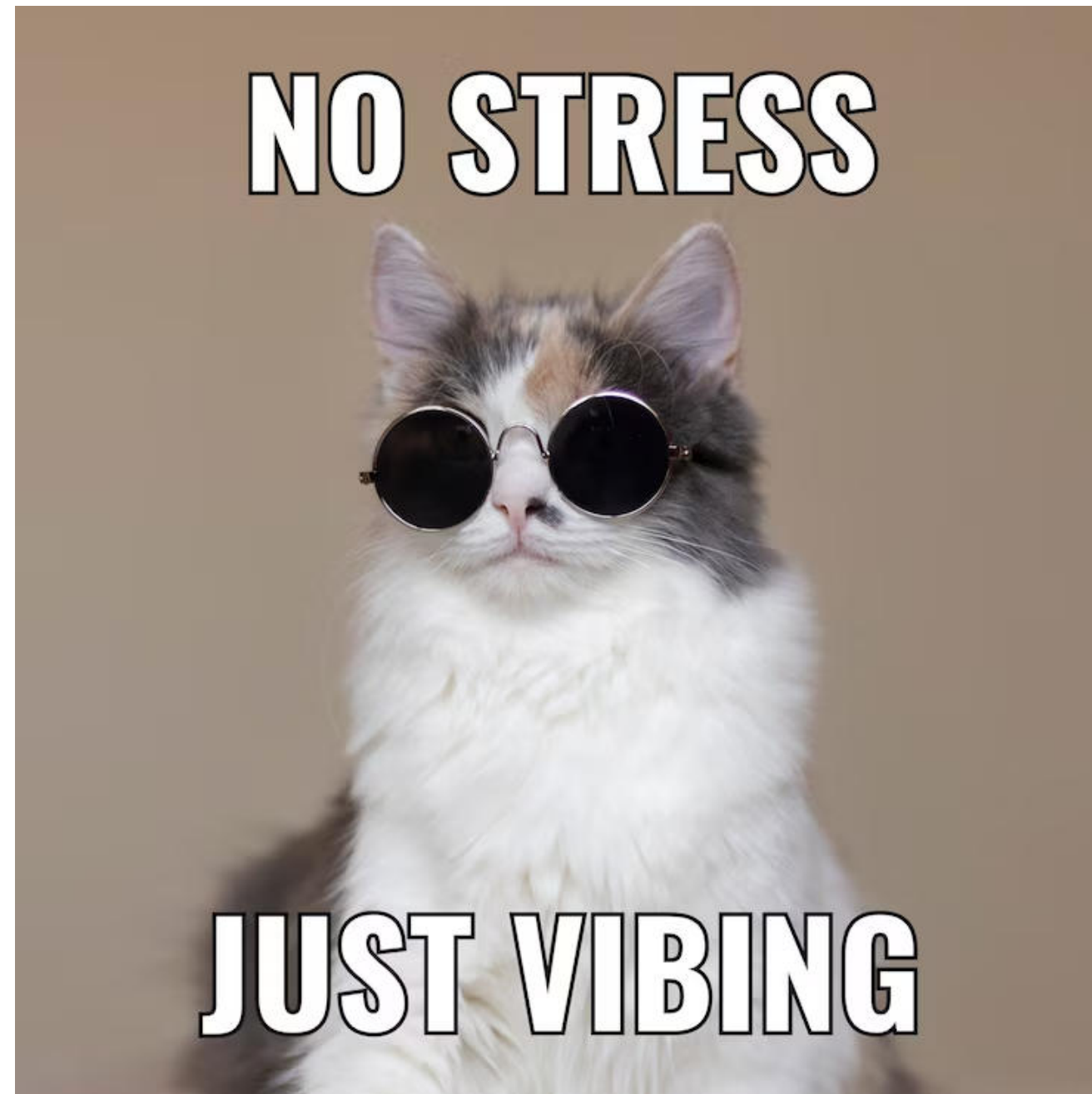
1. Imagine the situation/achieved goal in detail – how you find yourself in the situation, what is around you, you are the main character, you are the one who acts and experiences the situation.
2. Focus on how you want to look in the situation – how you stand, how you look, how you move.
3. Focus on what emotions you want to experience, how you want to feel (e.g., calm, confident, focused).
4. Focus on how you want to feel in your body (e.g., relaxed, breathing freely).
5. Give your vision physical form – write it down in a journal, record it on audio, draw it.

Gratitude training

- Focusing on the good things in our lives
- People who regularly express gratitude experience more positive emotions and cope better with difficult situations
- Exercise 1 - **10 fingers of gratitude**
 - **Once a day**, try to list **10 things for which you are truly grateful** on that particular day.
- Exercise 2 - **Three good things**
 - **Every day, write down 3 things**, moments, encounters **that went well** that day.



Thank you for your attention!





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