Lesson 6. Stress and Heart Rate (Breathing Exercises/Stretching)

Think back to a moment where you had to give a presentation or perform in front of an audience. What did your heart feel like during those last moments of anticipation? Was it racing? If you have experienced this feeling before, it is a typical response to a nervous situation and it is usually harmless. However, constant stress can be detrimental to the body and cause long-term health effects. There are different strategies you can use when dealing with this type of stress, that will help to calm you, and keep your body healthy.

Breathing

The **4-7-8 Breathing Technique** is used to help your body relax when stressed. It involves **breathing in through the nose for 4 counts**, **holding the breath for 7 counts**, and **exhaling through the mouth for 8 counts**. This breathing method has been useful for those suffering from anxiety and can help control emotional responses like anger.[1]

Stretching

Stretching is another effective strategy that can be used for stress management. These stretches can be done while seated.[2]

Torso Stretch[2]

- Sit tall with feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart
- Place hands behind your head with elbows out to the side
    - Variation: You can also cross your arms over your body or leave them at your sides
- Bend your body to one side, bending at the wrist. Keep your head facing forward. Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.
- Repeat 6-8 times on each side. Rest, then do a second set.

Neck Stretch [2]

- Sit tall, feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart
- Slowly turn your head to look over your shoulder. Keep your back against the chair and your shoulders facing forward. Hold the position for 10-30 seconds.
- Return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.
- Repeat 6-8 times on each side. Rest, then do a second set.

https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/cardiac-rehab/getting-physically-active/stretching-and-flexibility-exercises

1 Gunderson Health

2 American Heart Association