

# Managing stress with relaxation techniques

*A new audio exercise to help seafarers deal with stress at sea* 

We talk about feeling stressed when the pressures or demands of life get on top of us. We all feel stressed at times. Stress is not only normal but essential for survival and can be beneficial to us.

Although stress has a useful function, the effects of stress can be unpleasant or uncomfortable. If the stress is prolonged or repeated, many of the changes in our body can have longer term effects on our physical health and our wellbeing.

**For all these reasons, it is important to recognise stress and take measures to manage it. Our new audio relaxation exercise combines two techniques which can help.**

**Relaxation and Controlled Breathing** are both ways to relax your body. These work by calming your body and your mind and reversing the physiological changes which happen in our bodies at times of stress.

**Progressive Muscular Relaxation** is the easiest method for learning how to relax your body. The idea of the exercise is to learn the difference between how your muscles feel when they are tense and how they feel when they are relaxed.

It is physically impossible to be stressed and relaxed at the same time. Practising relaxation techniques helps us to build up some resilience to stress and makes it easier to use the techniques when we need them.

## Controlled Breathing Technique

All the physical effects of stress begin with the breath.



If we control our breathing (by breathing slowly and deeply from the bottom of our lungs), heart rate slows down and the body returns to its resting state.

You can use controlled breathing any time you notice your breathing is a little shallow or fast or whenever you notice sensations of stress, anxiety, fear or even anger. Controlled breathing can help you take a moment out before reacting and is excellent to use quickly just before you enter into a difficult situation.



**Our new audio relaxation exercise combines muscle relaxation with the controlled breathing technique. Practising them together helps your mind to associate relaxation with controlled breathing. This means that when you need to relax quickly and easily you can take a slow deep breath in, from the bottom of your lungs, remind yourself to relax and release the tension from your muscles. Like any new skill, relaxation does take time to learn.**

**Practise every day at least once a day for 10 days to 2 weeks to get the most from the technique. This exercise lasts 15 minutes.**

**Mindful breathing:** In mindful breathing, we notice our breath without trying to change it; in the controlled breathing technique, we deliberately alter our breathing. More information about mindful breathing can be found in our guide, *Steps to Positive Mental Health*.