

# HR PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## Better Manage Your Stress

Already the end of February! The good resolutions of the beginning of the year are perhaps a distant memory. Yet, if there is one to which one should not give up, it is indeed the one which consists in not letting oneself be invaded by stress. Here are some simple tips and tricks to stay calm in all circumstances.

### WHAT IS STRESS?

According to Institut National de Recherche et de Sécurité pour la prévention des accidents du travail et des maladies professionnelles (INRS), stress is felt when **an unbalance is perceived between what is required from the person and the resources available to meet those requirements**. Although stress is perceived psychologically, it can also affect physical health. Short-term stress, such as the need to meet deadlines, is not a problem in itself; it can indeed stimulate everyone to give the best of himself. Stress becomes a risk to health and safety when it is experienced over time.

From a biological point of view, stress is the body's response to any request made to it. We can distinguish the acute stress that stimulates and allows to give the best of oneself (stress symptoms simply stop when the stress situation stops), chronic stress that makes sick and demotivates. Chronic stress is always harmful to your health.

It is necessary to differentiate the stressor (the cause, the stimulus), stress (the reaction of the organism) and its consequences (disease, anxiety, irritation ...).

Although Article L230 of the Labor Code lays down the employer's obligation to take the necessary measures to ensure physical and mental health, stress at work is in France, the leading cause of sick leave<sup>1</sup> and costs between 0.8 and 1.6 billion euros per year to Social Security<sup>2</sup>. 20% of work stoppages of 2 to 4 months are related to stress.

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<sup>1</sup> European agency for safety and health at work

<sup>2</sup> INRS

## **WHAT ARE THE STRESS FACTORS IN THE PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT?**

- Factors related to work (tasks required, content of work, autonomy, quantitative requirements, qualitative ...)
- Factors related to the organization of work
- Factors related to labor relations (management, colleagues, ...)
- Factors related to the physical and technical environment (noise, heat, humidity, lack of space, lighting ...)
- Factors related to the company's socio-economic environment (competition, uncertainty about the future of the company, etc.)

In terms of human resources, we can measure the extent of these factors in the company by certain indicators such as absenteeism, turnover, the number of accidents and occupational diseases, a greater number of disabilities reported by the occupational doctor (see the newsletter on occupational medicine).

## **HOW DOES THE CHRONIC STRESS MANIFEST?**

The manifestations of stress are variable and may differ from one individual to another. Nevertheless, headaches, chronic fatigue, digestive problems, lack of recovery during sleep are some of the signs that need to be addressed because they can have lasting consequences on the body.

The symptoms of stress are divided into several phases:

- **The alarm phase:** the individual faces but uses his energy resources to adapt to stress (increased heart rate, temperature, blood pressure),
- **The resistance phase:** the individual persists in his adaptation to stress and resists. His energy resources are dwindling; the body is struggling to recover. The individual faces but is energized. The sugar level increases in the blood to bring energy.
- **The exhaustion phase:** the individual no longer faces. The situation has settled and lasts in time. The body is exhausted and his health significantly degrades health: pain, nervousness, hypertension, depression.

Before attempting to resolve stress, it is important to know what caused it. Reflecting upstream causes, certain consequences can be avoided.

### **Determine the reasons for your stress:**

- Make a list of your possible sources of stress,
- Rank them from the most important to the least important,
- Think about how you can reduce the factors that come to the top of the list,
- Develop a personal strategy to fight against moments of tension.

### **Use personal abilities and resources**

Managing stress is becoming aware of the gap between our representations and reality. It is necessary to know how to perceive and apprehend external situations. Self-analysis is particularly difficult when our state of tension does not allow us to reflect.

To do this, you will need:

- Think differently in order to learn to manage the different situations and adapt serenely
- Do not allow yourself to be invaded by negative thoughts and instead make room for positive thoughts,
- Rely on your skills,
- Grow your self-esteem

### **Some simple solutions to manage your stress**

*Manage your time effectively and make a list of tasks to do.*

Establish a weekly work plan and set short, medium and long term goals. Set priorities for each of your tasks. Decomposing the work into different processes distinct from one another makes it possible to relativize the amount of work and make it psychologically more accessible and therefore less painful.

Finally, eliminate anything that can be time-consuming (phone calls, e-mails ...) but leave space for unforeseen emergencies.

#### *Practice Positive Thinking*

The way of thinking and the attitude towards a situation are determining factors in the management of stress. When we encounter a difficulty, we often tend to let it take control of our emotions, at the risk of underestimating the level of resources we have to deal with problems. When you think negatively, you doubt your abilities, focus on what is wrong, see an obstacle as insurmountable, are in fear of failure. Using rational thinking to challenge your negative judgments and replace them with positive affirmations is also a way of fighting stress.

#### *Learn to breathe*

Respiration is by itself an anti-stress method par excellence. When we are in stress, we tend to block our breathing, which blocks our vital functions. It is therefore necessary to learn to control its breathing so that it becomes calm and deep and allow the energy to circulate throughout the body. Here is a simple exercise that you can practice as soon as the need arises: Sit comfortably, close your eyes, relax your jaw and relax your shoulders. Concentrate on your stomach. Inhale deeply through the nose by swelling your stomach. Count to 5. Exhale through the mouth imagining blowing into a straw and slowly empty the air out of your lungs. Repeat the exercise 3 times. Observe what is happening in you then open your eyes.

#### *Eliminate physical and mental tensions*

Here is another exercise to practice as often as necessary: eyes closed, sitting, back straight. Inhale through the nose. Stretch your arms and legs to the maximum. Tighten your fists. Strongly contract arms, fists, legs, exhaling slowly. Become aware of the relaxation that takes place in you. Open your eyes.

*Practice physical activity.*

The practice of physical activity is an excellent way to eliminate the tensions accumulated during the day and to increase your defenses to face stress, anxiety. Regular physical activity increases physical abilities and energy to accomplish daily tasks. It is up to you to find the sport that suits you best according to your goals, your physical abilities and that you will enjoy practicing over the long term.

But if you do not like sport, a simple walk, easy to integrate into your program can also help you to free yourself from your tensions.

*And....*

- Think of soft medicines: yoga, relaxation, reflexology, acupuncture, meditation ....
- Monitor your diet and bet on foods that will provide you with energy,
- Take care of your sleep,
- Allow yourself a laugh a day (researchers have shown that laughter is excellent for health and has a real impact on stress)
- Consult your doctor,
- **If you feel that your stress is linked to work, the occupational physician can help you and the members of the CHSCT, whose mission is to prevent stress and psychosocial risks in the company.**

Still have questions? Do not hesitate to contact Human Resources.

