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# **Ten Steps of Stress Reduction: the Intercultural Adapted Version of Training of Stress Reduction with Elements of Relaxation**

**(STRAIMY®-International)**

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**Abstract.** In this article, the author explains the intercultural adapted version of the training with elements of relaxation. In 10 Steps there is explained how is the way of coping stress: psycho-educative pathway: (1) Stress-Definition, (2) Situation, (3) Reaction, (4) Attitude, (5) Consequences, (6) Coping, (7) Resources, (8-9) Wishes and Aims (10) Closing. In the emotional-regulative pathway are lead through exercises (e.g., Yoga, Islamic or Buddhist praying, Autogenic Training), especially focused for the use in international context (e.g., Latvia, Indonesia, Nepal, Iran) and indicated for treatment of stress disorders and stressful traumatic circumstances (e.g., natural disasters, i.e., Nepal-earthquake, Merapi-eruption Indonesia or car accidental stress, e.g., in Iran and Germany). In the second part of the article are introduced some results of evaluation studies of STRAIMY in Germany and Latvia. Because of its scientific basic the training is listed in the German Psychological Association as an accepted evidence based stress reduction training.

**Keywords:** Stress reduction with relaxation, intercultural evidence based program stress reduction, evidence based Yoga program, STRAIMY

## **1 Introduction**

In this article, the author explains the actual version of the training with elements of relaxation (e.g. Yoga, Islamic or Buddhist praying, Autogenic Training), especially focused for the use in international context (e.g. Latvia, Indonesia, Nepal, Iran) and indicated for treatment of stress disorders and stressful traumatic circumstances (e.g. Nepal-earthquake, Merapi-eruption in Indonesia or car accidental stress in Iran or Germany).

Concerning stress reduction there are two ways of auto regulation internal coping (reflexive activities & emotional regulation) and two ways of external coping (changing conditions & learning abilities to solve problems). Based on this Model of Lazarus and Schroeder (as cited in Stueck, 2008) the following steps (sessions) are designed in 2 parts: 1: **Psychoeducation** (external and internal coping) and 2: **Emotional regulation** (Relaxation techniques, Islamic or Buddhist praying, Meditation, Yoga)

Psycho-education	<b>Internal coping (reflexive activities, exercises focused on behavioral concept of S-O-R-K (Situation, Organism, Reaction, Consequences) external coping (abilities concerning stress evoking condition)</b>
Relaxation	<b>Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Buddhist Meditation, Islam praying</b>

The STRAIMY®-Training was developed by the German psychologist Prof. Dr. M. Stueck at the Institute of Psychology, University of Leipzig from 1999 - 2008. Since than many STRAIMY®-instructors all over the world where educated (Latvia, Germany, Nepal).

In ten training sessions (or in three days/compact or seminar) stress reduction related competencies based on latest psychotherapeutic insights. They are conveyed in the following areas:

- individual diagnosis of stress exposure and stress signals and their health consequences,
- building skills to manage short-and long-term exposures better,
- dealing with unpleasant emotions and feelings, time management,
- working on the individual goal and desire formation.

The importance of this training as a stress coping possibility was proved, as part of a comprehensive scientific monitoring-investigation (see point 3).

## 2 Ten Steps of Stress Reduction

These ten steps are related to the actual use of the exercises in the STRAIMY® and to the handbooks of the original version. They have been proofed to work most in the practice. I gaps you will find the pages in the handbooks.

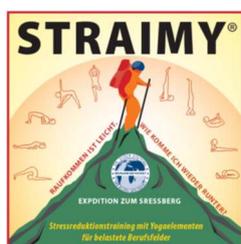


Figure 1. Logo and Handbook of STRAIMY®

The handbooks in English is available at <http://www.bildungsgesundheit.de>. The German version of the handbooks can be found at <http://www.schibri.de>.

Table 1. Ten steps (sessions) of stress reduction (the pages are related to the handbook)

	<b>Sequences</b>	<b>Homework</b>
Psycho-education	Introduction “Relation”, Group Rules	Observe situation which makes stress.

<b>Step 1</b>	Information: What is stress? Definition of stress (p. 7, 33)	Relaxation e.g. yoga, breathing (concentrate on your breathing if you feel nervous)
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
<b>Step 2</b>	Conclusion stressor analysis Information: Stress reduction start in your head Information: How leads stress to illness? (pp. 34-36) First we do OBSERVATION and UNDERSTANDING and ACCEPTANCE S – O – R – C – Structure (p. 40) Stressor-analysis (p. 39)	Observation of stressors, Relaxation e.g. Exercise yoga, breathing, praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
<b>Step 3</b>	Autogenic Training (p. 46) Conclusion stressor analysis Stressor – Reaction – Analysis (p. 40) If you describe situations, you have to describe it very concrete. Please describe exactly your Reactions (Body, Feeling, Thinking, Behavior)	Observations of Stress Situations and their reactions, relaxation e.g. Exercise yoga, breathing, praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
<b>Step 4</b>	Teaching of Autogenic Training Conclusion: Stressor – Reaction – Analysis Organism variable <b>Attitudes</b> which push stress-reaction (p. 47) <b>Needs:</b> 3 existential questions: 1) Where I want to life? 2) What I want to do? 3) With whom I want to life? <b>Biology:</b> Vegetative working point (pulse, blood pressure, p. 11)	Identify Stress pushing attitudes, Observation of your blood pressure relaxation e.g. Exercise yoga, breathing, praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
<b>Step 5</b>	Autogenic Training Conclusion: Attitudes – analysis Consequences – analysis (with AVEM/Work-related Experience and Behavior Pattern, p. 50; psychosomatic chronic reactions, p. 49)	Reading about AVEM -patterns and interpretation, relaxation e.g. Exercise yoga, breathing, praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
<b>Step 5</b>	Autogenic Training Conclusion Consequences Stress-coping “Lazarus Exercise”	3 questions of Lazarus, techniques of anger regulation,

<b>Step 6</b>	Example: Anger-regulation (anger in, anger control, anger out; short-long-term techniques) STEPS: Express anger by yourself, accept state afterwards, e.g. sadness, than speak with other (“do not shoot someone if you are angry”)	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
Psycho-education	Autogenic Training Resources: social support (e.g. social emergency hand, social atoms)	Visit your friends
<b>Step 7</b>	Friendship Exercise of Enjoyment	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
Psycho-education	Autogenic Training Exercise: How I want to use my life time?	IGEL-List
<b>Step 8</b>	Wishes, IGEL-list	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
Psycho-education	Autogenic Training Treasure map of wishes	Treasure Map of Wishes
<b>Step 9</b>		Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	
Psycho-education	AIMS Repeating, conclusion	Transformation of the Training aims (sent by the STRAIMY-instructor)
<b>Step 10</b>	Scale of AIMS	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying
Emotional-Regulation	Relaxation, Yoga, Breathing-Meditation, Praying	

## 2.1 STRAIMY-Training compact or special additional modules for STRAIMY

There are special options for additional modules or special applications of training:

a) After three months, there will be refreshing workshop for STRAIMY-Course participants (analyzing of the STRAIMY-Aims).

b) For the work with Trauma-victims or helpers of natural catastrophes (earthquake, high water, car accidents there will be 1 or 2 more sessions between the regularly sessions to speak longer about Situations (session 2), Reactions (session 3), Attitudes (session 4), Consequences (session 5), Coping (session 6), Resources (session 7) - here included the

concept of Resilience, Future Concept (sessions 8 & 9) and Closing session (session 10). The Training has up to 15 to 20 session depends on the impact of traumatization. Maybe accompanying individual EMDR sessions are necessary.

c) There are three days training, e.g. for companies:

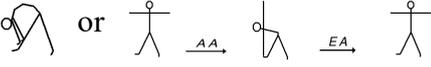
Day 1: Session 1 – 3 of Psycho-educational Part, Relaxation Part (e.g. Yoga or other techniques, Buddhist, Islam Praying)

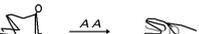
Day 2: Session 4 – 6 of Psycho-educational Part, Relaxation Part (e.g. Yoga or other techniques, Buddhist, Islam Praying)

Day 3: Session 7 – 10 of Psycho-educational Part, Relaxation Part (e.g. Yoga or other techniques, Buddhist, Islam Praying).

**2.2 Example for emotional regulation: Yoga exercises**

*Table 2. All exercises of self-regulation section (Yoga-section)*

Yoga exercise	
1. Opening ritual: cross-legged sit & respiratory collection (p. 59) - Hand rubbing on the eyes and body massage - Head turning slowly to the left and right	Fig. 12
2. <i>Tadasana</i> & breath observation (p. 53)	Fig. 1 
3. Shoulder circle	
4. Breath integration standing up (p. 53)	Fig. 3 
5. Small sun prayer (p. 97 ff.)	Fig. 16 
6. <i>Trikonasana</i> (p. 55)	Fig. 5 
7. Hero attitudes (p. 100)	Fig. 18 
8. Tree (p. 54)	Fig. 4 
9. <i>Savasana</i> (p. 55)	Fig. 6 

10. <i>Apanasana</i> (p. 55)	Fig. 7	
11. <i>Apanasana</i> – opened (p. 56 ff.)	Fig. 8	
12. Shoulder bridge (p. 57)	Fig. 9	
13. Yoga row: <i>Apanasana</i> & shoulder bridge (p. 70)	Fig. 14	
14. Candle (p. 98 ff.)	Fig. 17	
15. Half cobra (p. 58)	Fig. 10	
16. <i>Yoga-Mudra</i> (p. 59)	Fig. 11	
17. Cat and <i>Yoga-Mudra</i> (p. 135)	Fig. 22	
18. Cat and <i>Ujjayi</i> -exhalation (p. 149)	Fig. 23	
19. MA-exhalation (p. 116)	Fig. 20	
20. Breath meditation SO-HAM (p. 100)	Fig. 19	
21. OM singing stand-up (p. 207)	Fig. 27	
22. Meditation I (Imagination)		
23. OM singing in cross-legged sit (p. 59)	Fig. 13	
24. Walking meditation (p. 71)	Fig. 15	
<b>Facultative exercise</b>		
25. Meta meditation II (p. 149)	Fig. 2	
26. Biodanza exercise with music; segment exercise head-neck “Fliessen-Serie I” (p. 207)	Fig. 2	
<b>Autogenic Training</b>		
27. Autogenic Training (silence, gravity: arms & legs); carry out from the third meeting at the beginning of training sessions		

In the emotional regulative part there can also depend from cultural context takes place: Muslim praying, breathing meditation, art work-expression (e.g. painting, dancing), and Buddhist meditation.

### **3 Scientific Evaluation**

Stress is important and necessary psychological and physiological mechanism for human functioning that helps overcoming threatening situations (Stueck, 2008). In psychology and thus also in this program, a significance is vested in stress relation to emotions, accentuating the most important emotions which in case of their non-cessation threaten a person's psychic and physical health. These emotions are continued and insuperable fear, depressiveness, anger, and constant change of hope and resignation. Within the scope of stress self-management program, the link between stress and emotions is revealed and analyzed emphasizing the role of autonomous or the vegetative system (ANS) in stress regulation.

#### **3.1 STRAIMY concept and efficiency**

STRAIMY concept and efficiency has been studied in various projects and diploma papers and results of the studies have been summarized in Stueck's habilitation work which was worked out from 1999 to 2007. In Leipzig, a study was carried out on STRAIMY efficiency for teachers (Stueck, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2004).

The training period took place six months (in practice, the training took place in ten weeks, two hours once per week). Measures were taken before and right after the training course, as well as in six months. Forty teachers in twenty-two experimental groups (average age 43.64) and in eighteen control groups (average age 45.83) participated in the study. Participants of the experimental groups took part in the STRAIMY program for a time period of ten consecutive weeks, one time per week, two hours. In order to find out whether this training helps improving stress self-management skills (internal and external coping), a set of instruments was found so that it would be possible to measure the changes of reactions caused by cognitive and emotional stress, effect of relaxing and training on feeling of comfort and health. These parameters were acquired pursuant to the results of questionnaires of tension (stress) managing analysis by E. Richter, A. Rudolf, and M. Schmidt (Richter, Rudolf, and Schmidt *Fragebogen zur Analyse belastungsrelevanter Anforderungsbewältigung*) (Kazaka & Svence, 2008). Data acquired during the study confirmed the efficiency of this training as relaxation method. Results showed improvement of psychological (feeling of comfort, ability to relax), physiological (relaxing effect, skin sensitivity, pulse) and immunological (immunoglobulin A) of teachers involved in the study.

An instant and long-lasting decrease of consequences caused by stress was detected in the sense of a more successful functioning of a personality (communication models in working environment, self-efficiency, ability to regulate emotions, control of anger improved).

### **3.2 Study on immunological changes of participants of STRAIMY training (Stueck, Meyer, Rigotti, Bauer, & Sack, 2003; Stueck, 2008)**

Eleven teachers whose average age was 41.6 participated at the study. The subjective relaxation feeling of the participants was measured according to the 17-point scale of B. Binz and J. Wend (Binz & Wend, 1986, as cited in Kazaka & Svence, 2008), as well as the level of immunoglobulin A (IgA) before and after each training session. The level of IgA can be detected in saliva and it serves as parameter of protection skills of the immune system. Weakening of the immune system is directly related to the increased level of stress that is the cause for various psychosomatic illnesses.

After the sixth to the tenth STRAIMY training session, a significant increase of the level of IgA in the participants' saliva was detected. This means an increase in the participants' immune system protection abilities. The participants' subjective relaxation feeling was significantly increased after the eighth and tenth STRAIMY session.

### **3.3 Systolic blood pressure as stress indicator**

Blood pressure, especially the systolic pressure is figuratively called "seismograph of the soul". It is possible to prove by researches that stimuli of negative thoughts (and afterwards – emotions) increase blood pressure. Participants of the study had the changes of heart frequency and blood pressures measured by biofeedback equipment.

Results of the study showed that in case when a person thinks of something negative and worrying the systolic blood pressures increases, but at the relaxation phase it decreases. Because of its scientific basis, the training is listed in the German Psychological Association as an accepted evidence based stress reduction training.

### **3.4 Study on stress reduction training among teachers with elements of yoga and Biodanza (Stueck, Villegas, Perche, & Balzer, 2007)**

A 10-week stress-coping training with elements of yoga and Biodanza developed and modified for the needs of teachers to enhance their internal and external coping skills. It was evaluated with skin response as a parameter of sympathetic activation.

The results showed a decrease of sympathetic activation in the 24-hour-monitoring between the first and the second measurement (pre, post) of the yoga training as well as Biodanza. A high effect size ( $d' > 0.8$ ) and very high power ( $1-\beta > 0.8$ ) were shown with a long-term shift of the vegetative area from sympathetic states of strain to increasing parasympathic states of relaxation. Moreover, a better activity-relaxation-synchronization of basal-rest-activity-cycles (BRAC) was also observed in this study as a result of yoga and Biodanza. This means that the test persons easier reach their ideal ratio of strain and relaxation with 67% activation patterns and 33% relaxation patterns after both inventions which is an indicator for health. Thus, yoga as well as Biodanza are methods with an auto-regulative effect and may be seen as fairly new interventions to reduce stress and support health.

## 4 Conclusion

All in all there is a huge impact on the effects of STRAIMY according to the psycho-physiological health state of the tested persons. The different researches can prove the positive effects and show the range of this special intervention method. Doing this specific process in getting knowledge according to stress and health in combination with the use of Yoga-elements is a great mixture for improving the health situation of anyone.

So far there is no real contraindication according to the STRAIMY-method, but there is a big need to stay in contact with the persons during the intervention process to focus on their individual needs.

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