

Reactions to Stress and How to Reduce It

Signs of Stress

The stress reactions below are shown in categories so that they are easier to identify and understand. There is no magic number of symptoms or signs of stress that show difficulty in coping. What is more important is how the stress reaction is a change or different from a person's normal condition.

Also consider how long the symptoms have been present, how long they last, how often they happen and how strong they are to know how much a person is having difficulty coping with stress.

Emotional Signs	Behavioral Signs	Physical Signs
<p>Apathy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The "blahs" • Not enjoying the things you used to enjoy doing • Sad <p>Anxiety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restless • Agitated • Insecure • Feeling worthless <p>Mental Fatigue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distracted • Difficulty concentrating • Inflexible <p>Irritability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overly sensitive • Defensive • Arrogant and argumentative • Insubordinate and hostile <p>Other Emotional Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcompensation (denial) • Exaggerating • Overworks to exhaustion • Denies problems and symptoms • Suspicious or paranoid 	<p>Withdrawal (avoidance)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social isolation • Work related withdrawal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Not accepting or neglecting responsibilities <p>Acting Out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol abuse • Gambling • Spending spree • Promiscuity <p>Desperate Acting Out (getting attention, cry for help)</p> <p>Administrative Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tardy to work • Poor appearance • Poor personal hygiene • Accident prone <p>Legal Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being in debt • Shoplifting • Traffic tickets • Fights • Child or spouse abuse 	<p>Preoccupied (obsessed, worried, anxious) with illness (not able to tolerate or dwells on minor illness)</p> <p>Often ill (actually sick)</p> <p>Use of self-medication</p> <p>Physical exhaustion</p> <p>Immune system suppression</p> <p>Somatic (Body) Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Insomnia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Trouble falling asleep ◦ Waking up often ◦ Waking up early • Change in appetite • Weight gain • Weight loss (more serious) • Indigestion • Nausea (feel like throwing up) • Vomiting (throwing up) • Diarrhea (watery stools) • Constipation • Sexual difficulties

Ways to Reduce Stress

Deep Breathing Exercise

It is normal for this healthy breathing to feel a little strange at first. With practice, it will become more natural to you.

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Take 3 deep cleansing breaths.
3. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
4. Try to breathe so that only your stomach rises and falls.
 - As you breathe in, concentrate on your chest staying still as your stomach rises. It may be helpful to imagine that your pants are too big and you need to push your stomach out to hold them up.
 - When breathing out, allow your stomach to fall in and the air to fully escape.
5. Take some deep breaths, concentrating on only moving your stomach.
6. Return to regular breathing, keep breathing so that only your stomach moves. Focus on an easy, regular breathing pattern.

The CALM Reminder

Chest: Breathing slower and deeper

Arms: Shoulders sag

Legs: Loose and flexible

Mouth: Jaw drop

Cue-Controlled Relaxation

Cue-controlled relaxation is a quick and easy way to relax. A cue is a reminder. Set up a cue to remind you to relax. It is very important that when you set up a cue, that you actually do the relaxation exercise when the cue comes up. Over time it will become a healthy habit.

1. There are two different types of cues (reminders)

- **External Cue:** when your watch alarm sounds, when you see a note on your desk or at traffic lights
- **Internal Cue:** when your muscles reach a certain tension level, when you feel a headache coming on

2. Relax by doing the following

- Take a deep, easy breath in
- Breathe out slowly
- Say a word to yourself as you breathe out (such as relax or calm)
- As you breathe out, focus on letting your muscles relax. As an option (if it is easy and safe at the time) you can also close your eyes.

Ways to Reduce Stress

What to do if you are having upsetting thoughts

Examine your thoughts for key words that:

- Do not set realistic standards for yourself and others: must, should, have to
- Are black and white thinking: never, always, every
- Lead to feeling doomed: awful, horrible, disaster
- Are negative labels: jerk, slob, creep, stupid

Question if your thoughts are correct or true.

- Am I upsetting myself needlessly? How can I see this another way?
- Is my thinking working for or against me? How can I see this in a less upsetting way?
- What am I demanding must happen? What do I want rather than need?
- Am I making something too terrible? Is it really that bad? What would be so bad about it?
- Am I labeling a person? What is the action that I do not like?
- What is not true about my thoughts? How can I stick to the facts? What is the proof for what I am thinking or believing about this?
- Am I using extreme, black and white language? What less extreme words are more true?
- Am I fortune telling (saying what the future will be) or mind reading in a way that gets me upset or unhappy? What is the chance that it will really turn out the way I am thinking or imagining?
- What are my options in this situation? How would I like to respond?
- Make more moderate, helpful, or realistic statements to replace the upsetting ones.
- Have I had any experiences that show that this thought might not be all true?
- If my best friend or someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?
- If my best friend or someone I loved knew I was thinking like this, what would they say to me? What would they tell me that would show that my thinking is not all true?
- Are there strengths in me or positives in what is going on that I am not seeing? Am I not seeing my own ability to cope with difficult times?
- When I am not feeling this way, do I think about this situation any differently? How?
- Have I been in this kind of situation before? What happened? What have I learned from past experiences that may help me now?
- Five years from now, if I look back on this time, will I look at it any differently? Will I focus on any different part of what happened?
- Am I blaming myself for something I do not have complete control of?