
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

The Stress Response and How it Can Affect You

The Stress Response

The *stress response*, or “fight or flight” response is the emergency reaction system of the body. It is there to keep you safe in emergencies. The stress response includes physical and thought responses to your perception of various situations. When the stress response is turned on, your body may release substances like adrenaline and cortisol. Your organs are programmed to respond in certain ways to situations that are viewed as challenging or threatening.

The stress response can work against you. You can turn it on when you don't really need it and, as a result, perceive something as an emergency when it's really not. It can turn on when you are just thinking about past or future events. Harmless, chronic conditions can be intensified by the stress response activating too often, with too much intensity, or for too long. Stress responses can be different for different individuals. Below is a list of some common stress responses can be different for different individuals. Below is a list of some common stress related responses people have. (Circle the responses you have had in the last 2 weeks.)

Physical Responses

- Muscle aches
- ↑ Heart rate
- Weight Gain
- Constipation
- Muscle Twitching
- Low Energy
- Tight Chest
- Dizziness
- Stomach Cramps
- Insomnia
- Headache
- Nausea
- Dry Mouth
- Weight Loss
- Weakness
- Diarrhea
- Trembling
- Chills
- Sweating
- Choking Feeling
- Leg Cramps

The Stress Response and how it Affects You (continued)

- Hot Flashes
- Pounding Heart
- Chest Pain
- Numb or Tingling Hands/Feet
- ↑ Blood Pressure
- Dry Throat
- Face Flushing
- Feeling Faint
- Neck Pain
- ↑ Urination
- Light Headedness

Emotional and Thought Responses

- Restlessness
- Agitation
- Worthlessness
- Depression
- Guilt
- Anger
- Nightmares
- Sensitivity
- Numbness
- Mood Swings
- ↓ Concentration
- Preoccupation
- Insecurity
- Anxiety - Stress
- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Defensiveness
- Racing Thoughts
- Intense Thinking
- Expecting the Worst
- Lack of Motivation
- Forgetfulness
- Rigidity
- Intolerance

Behavioral Responses

- Avoidance
- Neglect
- ↑ Smoking
- Poor Appearance
- ↑ Spending
- ↓ Eating
- Nail Biting
- ↑ Talking
- Sexual Problems
- Fidgeting
- ↓ Exercise
- Aggressive Speaking
- ↑ Sleeping
- ↓ Relaxing activities

The Stress Response and how it Affects You (continued)

- Withdrawal
- ↑ Alcohol use
- ↑ Eating
- Arguing
- Poor Hygiene
- Seeking Reassurance
- Skin Picking
- ↑ Body checking
- Foot Tapping
- Rapid Walking
- Teeth Clenching
- Multitasking
- ↓ Fun activities

The parasympathetic nervous system in your body is designed to turn on your body's *relaxation response*. Your behaviors and thinking can keep your body's natural relaxation response from operating at its best.

Getting your body to relax on a daily basis for at least brief periods can help decrease unpleasant stress responses. Learning to relax your body, through specific breathing and relaxation exercises as well as by minimizing stressful thinking, can help your body's natural relaxation system be more effective. Your Behavioral Health Provider can assist you with learning relaxation techniques.

The Center for Integrated Healthcare thanks Christopher Hunter, PhD, ABPP, et al. for use of the above information taken from *Integrated Behavioral Health in Primary Care* by C.L. Hunter, J.L. Goodie, M.S. Oordt & A.C. Dobbmeyer. Published by the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, 2009.

Recommended Reading

- "Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy Revised and Updated" by David D. Burns, M.D. 1999, New York, NY: Avon Books.
- "Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, 2nd Edition: An Updated Guide To Stress, Stress Related Diseases, and Coping" ("Scientific American" Library) (Paperback) by Robert M. Sapolsky 2004.
- "The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook, Fourth Edition" (Paperback) by Edmund J. Bourne. 2005, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
- "Coping with Anxiety: 10 Simple Ways to Relieve Anxiety, Fear & Worry" (Paperback) by Edmund J. Bourne. 2003, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
- "Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think" (Paperback) by Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky. 1995, Guilford Publications, Inc.