

# Physical Reactions to Stress: When Your Body Says “Enough!”



Health and Wellness

Stress is an inescapable and sometimes overwhelming part of life.

Chronic, unresolved stress is associated with serious health consequences including insomnia, migraines, accidents and illness. Here are some signs that tell us when we are stressed with some stress management techniques that anyone can try.

## Common Stress Reactions

**Symptoms:** Pale skin, dry mouth and cold hands are common stress reactions in new situations. These often occur during times of stress or nervousness, such as when giving a speech, making a presentation in front of a group or having a difficult conversation.

**Solutions:** Take a few minutes alone to calm yourself before the event. Exercise, walk or stretch while breathing slowly and fully. Practice visualization—imagine how you want the event to go. Remember to drink plenty of water.

## Sleep Disturbances

**Symptoms:** Sleep disturbance symptoms include insomnia, early morning waking, oversleeping, restless, fitful sleep and inability to fall asleep because of racing thoughts.

**Solutions:** Try listening to soothing music, reading a good book, and taking a warm bath to help you relax into sleep. Do some gentle stretching exercises. Avoid coffee and other drinks containing caffeine. Keep a journal and write your way out of those restless hours by releasing any troubling thoughts. Put 30 minutes of rigorous physical activity into your daily schedule—even brisk walking in your neighborhood will help.

## Sore Muscles and Headaches

**Symptoms:** The common stress reaction known as “flight or fight” puts your body on high alert, with your muscles automatically tensing up to fight or run away. This constant tension makes muscles sore and fatigued, which can lead to headaches, especially when the neck and shoulder muscles are being strained.

**Solutions:** Regular stretching exercises can help. Again, try to schedule 30 minutes of physical activity into your day, even when you are not experiencing stress.

## Burnout

**Symptoms:** You feel like you can never catch up. Your body, mind and spirit are all running on empty. Burnout can occur when chronic stress is not balanced by periods of regular rest and positive, healthy activities.

**Solutions:** Reach out to others and spend time with people that you love and trust. Listen to your favorite kind of music or listen to relaxation sounds. Take a brief vacation from stress. Watch a funny movie with friends or eat a great meal in a relaxing environment. Don't attempt to numb the emotional pain with drugs or alcohol. And most of all, don't give yourself a guilt trip for having these reactions. They are all part of being human.

## Quick Stressbusters

Try one of these behaviors for some quick relief the next time you find yourself having to cope with a stressful or tense situation:

- Laugh out loud.
- Pet your dog.
- Clean your clutter.
- Drink some water.
- Stretch.
- Sing a song.
- Take a walk.
- Chew some gum.
- Take a deep breath.

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