

# How **STRESS** affects your body!

Here are ways in which some key body systems react.

## 1 NERVOUS SYSTEM

When stressed — physically or psychologically — the body suddenly shifts its energy resources to fighting off the perceived threat. In what is known as the “fight or flight” response, the sympathetic nervous system signals the adrenal glands to release adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones make the heart beat faster, raise blood pressure, change the digestive process and boost glucose levels in the bloodstream. Once the crisis passes, body systems usually return to normal.

## 2 MUSCULOSKELETAL SYSTEM

Under stress, muscles tense up. The contraction of muscles for extended periods can trigger tension headaches, migraines and various musculoskeletal conditions.

## 3 RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

Stress can make you breathe harder and cause rapid breathing — or hyperventilation — which can bring on panic attacks in some people.

## 4 CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM

Acute stress — stress that is momentary, such as being stuck in traffic — causes an increase in heart rate and stronger contractions of the heart muscle. Blood vessels that direct blood to the large muscles and to the heart dilate, increasing the amount of blood pumped to these parts of the body. Repeated episodes of acute stress can cause inflammation in the coronary arteries, thought to lead to heart attack.

## 5 ENDOCRINE SYSTEM

Adrenal glands

When the body is stressed, the brain sends signals from the hypothalamus, causing the adrenal cortex to produce cortisol and the adrenal medulla to produce epinephrine — sometimes called the “stress hormones.”

Liver

When cortisol and epinephrine are released, the liver produces more glucose, a blood sugar that would give you the energy for “fight or flight” in an emergency.

## 6 GASTROINTESTINAL SYSTEM

Esophagus

Stress may prompt you to eat much more or much less than you usually do. If you eat more or different foods or increase your use of tobacco or alcohol, you may experience heartburn, or acid reflux.

Stomach

Your stomach can react with “butterflies” or even nausea or pain. You may vomit if the stress is severe enough.

Bowels

Stress can affect digestion and which nutrients your intestines absorb. It can also affect how quickly food moves through your body. You may find that you have either diarrhea or constipation.



## 7 REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

In men, excess amounts of cortisol, produced under stress, can affect the normal functioning of the reproductive system. Chronic stress can impair testosterone and sperm production and cause impotence.

In women, stress can cause absent or irregular menstrual cycles or more-painful periods. It can also reduce sexual desire.

# Simple Meditation Techniques

**Posture:** Sit upright. Place your hands on your thighs at the junction of the thigh and abdomen. The palms should be upward. Keep the chest up, the chin level and the shoulders back. Maintain this erect, upright position as you consciously relax the whole body.

**Tense and Relax:** Inhale deeply and tense the whole body in a wave. Hold the breath and the tension briefly, then throw the breath out and relax completely. Repeat twice more.

**Measured Breathing:** Inhale slowly through the nose to a count of six to ten, as it is comfortable, hold for the same count, and exhale to the same count. Repeat 3-6 times. Then inhale and exhale deeply and breath normally.

**Watching the Breath:** Become aware of yourself breathing. Notice the breath as it flows in and out of the nose. As you relax you'll feel the breath higher and higher in the nose. Breath naturally.

**Eyes:** With closed eyes, raise your gaze slightly upward as if looking out at a mountain peak in the distance, without straining the muscles of your eyes.

**Mantra (words of power):** Observe the breath as it flows in and out naturally through the nose, watching it without controlling it. As you inhale, mentally say "Hong" (the sound of the inhalation, rhymes with "song"), as you exhale, mentally say "Sau" (pronounced "saw"). If you don't feel comfortable with the mantra, you can repeat an affirmation: "I am" with the inhalation, and "Peace" with the exhalation.

**Keep coming back:** If your mind wanders, simply bring it back to the breath and the mantra. As your breath becomes calmer, feel with that calmness that you're touching your inner center. Watch the breath for as long as you find it enjoyable (5-15 minutes is fine).

**End your practice:** Take a deep breath, exhale, and forget the breath. Sit quietly, keep your gaze at the point between the eyebrows and visualize, feel, or simply be aware of a positive quality (peace, love, joy, etc.). Concentrate on that quality for at least half the time you spent watching the breath, feeling it permeate your mind and body. Then you can visualize it expanding from you to touch other people or situations.

To finish, come back to outer awareness, gently bringing that same quality into your life and activity

# 50 common signs and symptoms of stress

1. Frequent headaches, jaw clenching or pain
2. Gritting, grinding teeth
3. Stuttering or stammering
4. Tremors, trembling of lips, hands
5. Neck ache, back pain, muscle spasms
6. Light headedness, faintness, dizziness
7. Ringing, buzzing or "popping sounds"
8. Frequent blushing, sweating
9. Cold or sweaty hands, feet
10. Dry mouth, problems swallowing
11. Frequent colds, infections, herpes sores
12. Rashes, itching, hives, "goose bumps"
13. Unexplained or frequent "allergy" attacks
14. Heartburn, stomach pain, nausea
15. Excess belching, flatulence
16. Constipation, diarrhea, loss of control
17. Difficulty breathing, frequent sighing
18. Sudden attacks of life threatening panic
19. Chest pain, palpitations, rapid pulse
20. Frequent urination
21. Diminished sexual desire or performance
22. Excess anxiety, worry, guilt, nervousness
23. Increased anger, frustration, hostility
24. Depression, frequent or wild mood swings
25. Increased or decreased appetite
26. Insomnia, nightmares, disturbing dreams
27. Difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts
28. Trouble learning new information
29. Forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion
30. Difficulty in making decisions
31. Feeling overloaded or overwhelmed
32. Frequent crying spells or suicidal thoughts
33. Feelings of loneliness or worthlessness
34. Little interest in appearance, punctuality
35. Nervous habits, fidgeting, feet tapping
36. Increased frustration, irritability, edginess
37. Overreaction to petty annoyances
38. Increased number of minor accidents
39. Obsessive or compulsive behavior
40. Reduced work efficiency or productivity
41. Lies or excuses to cover up poor work
42. Rapid or mumbled speech
43. Excessive defensiveness or suspiciousness
44. Problems in communication, sharing
45. Social withdrawal and isolation
46. Constant tiredness, weakness, fatigue
47. Frequent use of over-the-counter drugs
48. Weight gain or loss without diet
49. Increased smoking, alcohol or drug use
50. Excessive gambling or impulse buying