

# Common Stress Reactions

## **BEHAVIORAL**

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- Increase or decrease in activity level
- Substance use or abuse (self-medication: alcohol or drugs)
- Difficulty communicating or listening
- Irritability, outbursts of anger, frequent or increased arguments / conflict
- Inability to rest or relax
- Decline in job/school performance; absenteeism
- Frequent crying
- Hypervigilance or excessive worry
- Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- Increased risk of becoming involved in accidents (accident prone)

## **PHYSICAL**

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- Gastrointestinal problems (i.e. indigestion or diarrhea)
- Headaches or other aches and pains (stomach aches, muscle aches, etc.)
- Visual Disturbances
- Changes in appetite
- Sweating or chills
- Tremors or muscle twitching
- Being easily startled
- Chronic fatigue, exhaustion, or other sleep disturbances
- Immune system disorders
- Worsening of previous medical conditions

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL / EMOTIONAL**

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| ➤ Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable | ➤ Guilt or self-doubt                   |
| ➤ Denial                                    | ➤ Apathy, numbness, or disconnectedness |
| ➤ Anxiety or fearfulness                    | ➤ Grief                                 |
| ➤ Anger                                     | ➤ Hopelessness and despair              |
| ➤ Depression                                | ➤ Unpredictable mood swings             |

## **THINKING**

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| ➤ Memory problems                                   | ➤ Slow thought processes, difficulty concentrating |
| ➤ Disorientation or confusion                       | ➤ Loss of objectivity                              |
| ➤ Preoccupation                                     | ➤ Recurring dreams or nightmares                   |
| ➤ Difficulty setting priorities or making decisions |  |

## **SOCIAL**

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- Isolation or withdrawal
- Blaming
- Difficulty in giving or accepting support or help
- Inability to experience pleasure or to have fun (or guilt / shame)

## **SPIRITUAL**

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- Shattered sense of meaning
- Questioning spiritual beliefs
- Hyper-religious

## EFFECTIVE SELF-CARE



Headington Institute

You will never become so good at taking care of yourself that you lead a stress-free life. However, there is much you can do to help alleviate stress reactions.

No single technique will relieve all your stress, but paying attention to the following three areas of self-care may build up your *hardiness* (your ability to handle more stress with less distress) and your *resilience* (your ability to “bounce back” after particularly stressful or traumatic events).

### Physical

Regular exercise  
Sleep  
Healthy eating  
Drinking enough water  
Humor and laughter  
Limit your consumption of alcohol  
Pilates or yoga  
Relaxation techniques (such as progressive muscle relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing, visualization and meditation)  
Massage, whirlpool, sauna  
Repetitive activities (such as cross-stitching, walking, quilting, drawing and cooking)

### Emotional and relational

Nurturing relationships  
Contact with home/friends through email, phone, tapes  
Talking  
Humor  
Ongoing support group  
Reflection: journaling, writing, meditating, poetry  
Creative activity such as drawing, sculpting, cooking, painting and photography  
Movies, books, music  
Having balanced priorities  
Understanding traumatic stress and have realistic expectations  
Counseling

### Spiritual

Knowing your values: Where do you tend to find meaning and purpose in life?  
Participating in a community of meaning and purpose  
Regular times of prayer, reading, meditation  
Spiritually meaningful conversations  
Singing or listening to meaningful music  
Contact with religious leaders or inspiring individuals  
Time with art, nature or music  
Solitude