

Taking Control of Your Stress

- **Give yourself a break.** What you may be experiencing is a common reaction – don't label yourself as "going crazy."
 - **Increase your physical activity.** Within the first 24-48 hours, periods of exercise (walking, running, aerobics, yard or house work, etc.) alternated with relaxation can alleviate some physical reactions.
 - **Share your stress.** Sometimes just talking with a friend or family member helps. Reach out – people do care.
 - **Sleep and diet.** The better rested and nourished you are, the better equipped you are to tackle your stress. If sleep and eating difficulties persist, ask for help.
 - **Recognize your limits.** Learn to accept that you are not capable of doing all things all the time. You are healing. At the same time, keep your life as normal as possible.
 - **Get involved.** Becoming a participant is a good way to reduce stress. Spend time with others.
 - **Prioritize your time.** Write down the things you have to do in the order that they have to be done.
 - **Alcohol and drugs** – neither helps you to actually manage your stress. Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol.
 - **Do things that you enjoy doing.** Do something for yourself that might make you feel better.
 - **Don't make any big decisions or life changes.** This includes relationship or job changes. Try to not take action for at least 6 weeks.
 - **Realize those around you are under stress also.** Share your feelings with others and check out how they're doing.
- Remember** – As a human being you may experience a variety of common reactions to challenging and crisis situations.



Common Stress Reactions to Difficult Events

Anyone that experiences a stressful event may experience one or more of these common signs and reactions. These are common reactions to a difficult event, and although painful, they are part of the healing process.

Request a response team
24 hours a day

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Common Stress Reactions

Everyone reacts differently to stress and difficult events. Some people will have multiple reactions while others may have none or just a few. Life experiences and personal levels of resilience alter how a person may react.

Review this list now. In a few days, look at it again. If you notice you are experiencing some of these reactions, be assured you are not broken. It is common to have some reactions.

PHYSICAL/BODY

- fatigue
- muscle tremors/twitches
- nausea
- elevated blood pressure
- thirst
- nonspecific body complaints
- headaches
- loss or increase in appetite
- dizziness
- visual difficulties
- rapid heart rate
- grinding of teeth
- chills
- profuse sweating
- fainting

**Indicates need for medical evaluation*

- vomiting*
- physical weakness*
- difficulty breathing*
- chest pain*
- shock symptoms*

COGNITIVE/MIND

- blaming someone
- hyper vigilance or increased vigilance/ watchfulness
- confusion
- poor concentration
- nightmares, distressing dreams or intrusive images
- uncertainty or poor decision-making
- suspiciousness
- memory problems
- poor problem solving
- poor abstract thinking
- disturbed thinking
- difficulty identifying familiar objects or people
- increased or decreased awareness of surroundings
- disorientation (time, place and/or person)
- react to criticism, as if attacked

SPIRITUAL

- doubt
- preoccupation with spiritual meaning
- questioning beliefs or values
- crisis of faith

EMOTIONAL

- anxiety
- guilt
- grief
- panic
- denial
- emotional shock

- fear, uncertainty or apprehension
- sadness or depression
- feeling overwhelmed
- emotional outburst or loss of control
- intense anger, irritability or agitation
- feeling numb or cold
- feeling isolated
- intense worry about others

BEHAVIORAL

- change in socialization or antisocial acts
- suspiciousness
- change in eating habits
- intensified pacing or erratic movements
- inability to rest / relax
- sleep problems
- less humor
- withdrawal/isolation ("others do not understand")
- change in usual communications/speech
- increase in alcohol and/ or drug consumption
- change in sexual functioning
- hyper alert to environment

There are several things you can do to lessen the impact of stressful events. See **Taking Control of Your Stress** on the back panels.

Adapted from the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc., 1995 and <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/problems/common-reactions-after-trauma.asp>

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