

Address Your Stress

You feel stressed – we feel it too.

What is Stress?

Stress is our body and mind's natural reaction to potential threats, also known as stressors. Stress shows up in different ways, such as sweating, higher heart rate, racing thoughts, and trouble concentrating. Stress is neither good or bad: stress has helped humans survive and respond quickly to threats.

However, our bodies get overwhelmed when we stay stressed all the time, especially when there are many stressors at the same time.

Your body's stress response is completely normal. It's your subconscious looking out for you – but this backfires when you never get back to a relaxed state.

Understanding stress in your brain and body can help you. Here is how your body naturally responds to stressors and potential threats:

- **Recognition:** Whether or not you know it, your brain senses potential threat.
- **Assessment:** Your brain sizes up the threat to decide how to react.
- **Mobilization:** Critical thinking shuts down and your body gets charged to react to the threat.
- **Response:** You go into fight, flight, freeze or fawn to survive the threat.
- **Return:** Threat now gone, you go back to normal body and mind functioning.

When our bodies have mobilized and are responding to threats, it can feel like someone else is in our head, someone who takes actions we would never choose in our right minds. We can stop this feeling and get back to our true selves faster by learning to **interrupt the stress response**.

Interrupting the stress response is an essential skill to get to the return state where critical thinking is back and we can better plan and react to our environment. Think of interrupters as the effective way to tell your body to calm down. Some examples of stress interrupters are deep breathing, physical activity, and connecting with a friend or family member.

Be ready to use these skills by identifying your consistent stressors, also known as triggers. Ask yourself:

- What is usually going on when you feel stressed and what do you do in response?
- Are there situations that consistently make you agitated or upset?

Common stressors include:

- Experiencing a major life change such as moving, losing a loved one, starting a new job, having a child, or getting married.
- Experiencing poor physical health.
- Not having a network of support.
- Not getting enough sleep.
- Not eating well.

Interrupting stress in the moment can keep you from causing harm to yourself and others, but for long-term health, you may need more support. Coping with chronic stress can include healing from past trauma, seeing a trained professional, and making environmental and lifestyle changes to cut down the stressors in your life.

