

RECOVER ARRIVE BECOME

CLINICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

TRAUMA & THE BODY

WHY STRESS CAN FEEL PHYSICAL

Trauma reminders can activate the body's alarm system. Physical reactions are real even when the danger belongs to the past.

THE ALARM SYSTEM

- The brain and body are designed to respond quickly to possible danger.
- A reminder can be a sound, smell, person, place, date, thought, feeling, or body sensation.
- The body may react before you consciously recognize what reminded you of the past.

HEART & BREATHING

- Racing or pounding heart.
- Fast, shallow, or uncomfortable breathing.
- Chest tightness or feeling unable to settle.
- Feeling lightheaded, shaky, hot, cold, or sweaty.

MUSCLES & PAIN

- Tight shoulders, neck, jaw, hands, or back.
- Headaches or increased awareness of pain.
- Feeling restless, braced, jumpy, or unable to relax.
- Some people feel heavy, weak, frozen, or unusually tired instead.

STOMACH, SLEEP & ENERGY

- Nausea, stomach discomfort, appetite changes, or needing the bathroom more often.
- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking from distressing dreams.
- Exhaustion after a period of high alert.
- Stress can also make existing health symptoms feel harder to manage.

HELP THE BODY ORIENT

- Look around and name where you are, the date, and what is different now.
- Press your feet into the floor or notice support from the chair.
- Lengthen the exhale without forcing a very deep breath.
- Sip water, stretch, walk gently, or use temperature and sensory grounding if helpful.

WHEN TO GET SUPPORT

- Reach out when reactions are intense, persistent, frightening, or interfering with daily life.
- A medical professional can evaluate new, severe, or unexplained physical symptoms.
- A trauma-informed clinician can help connect body reactions with coping and recovery.
- Call/text 988 for crisis support; 911 for immediate danger.

Your body may be trying to protect you based on past learning.

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