



**STRESS AND  
YOUR BODY**

# STRESS AND YOUR BODY

There are two types of stress: positive and negative.

Stress is a normal reaction to exciting events like falling in love, getting a new job, or buying a home. Stress is also a hardwired survival technique built into your body as a means of protection. When triggers arise, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) signals the “fight or flight response,” which mobilizes you to take action and avoid danger.

The issue is that your body doesn't know the difference between a bear chasing you and work-related anxiety.

Your body's stress response is perfectly healthy when there's a real emergency (like a bear chase), but if your body is constantly getting stress signals for everyday issues (such as work-related anxiety), you'll burn out over time.

**Read on for the three stages of the stress response.<sup>1</sup>**

## 1. THE ALARM STAGE

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When your body goes into panic mode, your SNS is activated to protect you from stress and your brain triggers the adrenal glands to secrete glucocorticoid hormones, like cortisol and epinephrine (adrenaline). The rest of your body is then alerted to these symptoms, equipping you with emergency fuel and energy in reaction to your panic.

**As stress levels rise, many physiological changes occur in the body.**



**Pulse, blood pressure, blood sugars, blood fats, respiration, sweating, and pupil dilation levels**

## 2. THE ADAPTIVE/RESISTANCE STAGE

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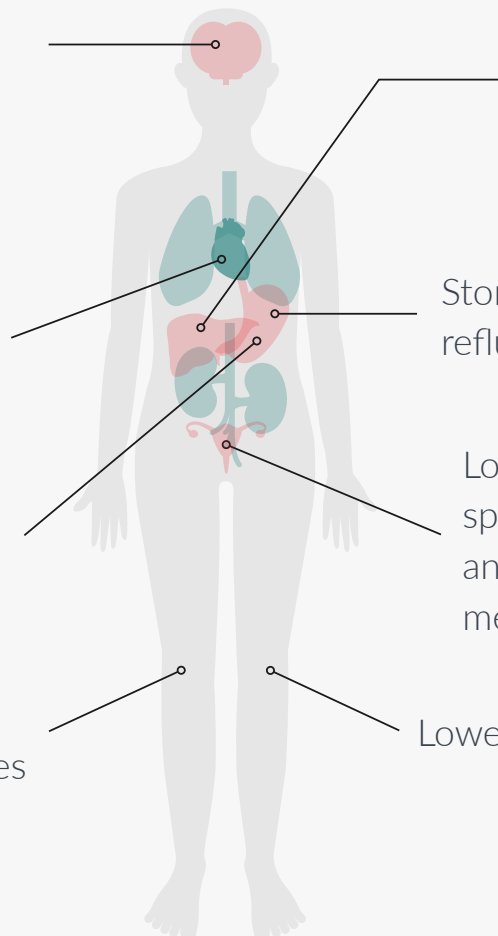
After the initial stress response, your body attempts to return to homeostasis (its stable state). But when your stress reactions are too strong or triggered too often, your body will remain on high alert. As a result of this constant stress, your body builds up a resistance and tolerance to coexist with continuous stressors. This extended release of stress hormones has adverse effects on your body, lowering your immunity defenses and making you more susceptible to illness.

Mood issues, including anger and depression, lack of energy, and sleep issues

Increased blood pressure and heart rate, higher cholesterol, and risk of heart attack

Increased fat storage and disrupted hunger cues

Aches and pains in the joints and muscles



Reduced ability to fight and recover from illness due to lowered immunity

Stomach cramps, reflux, and nausea

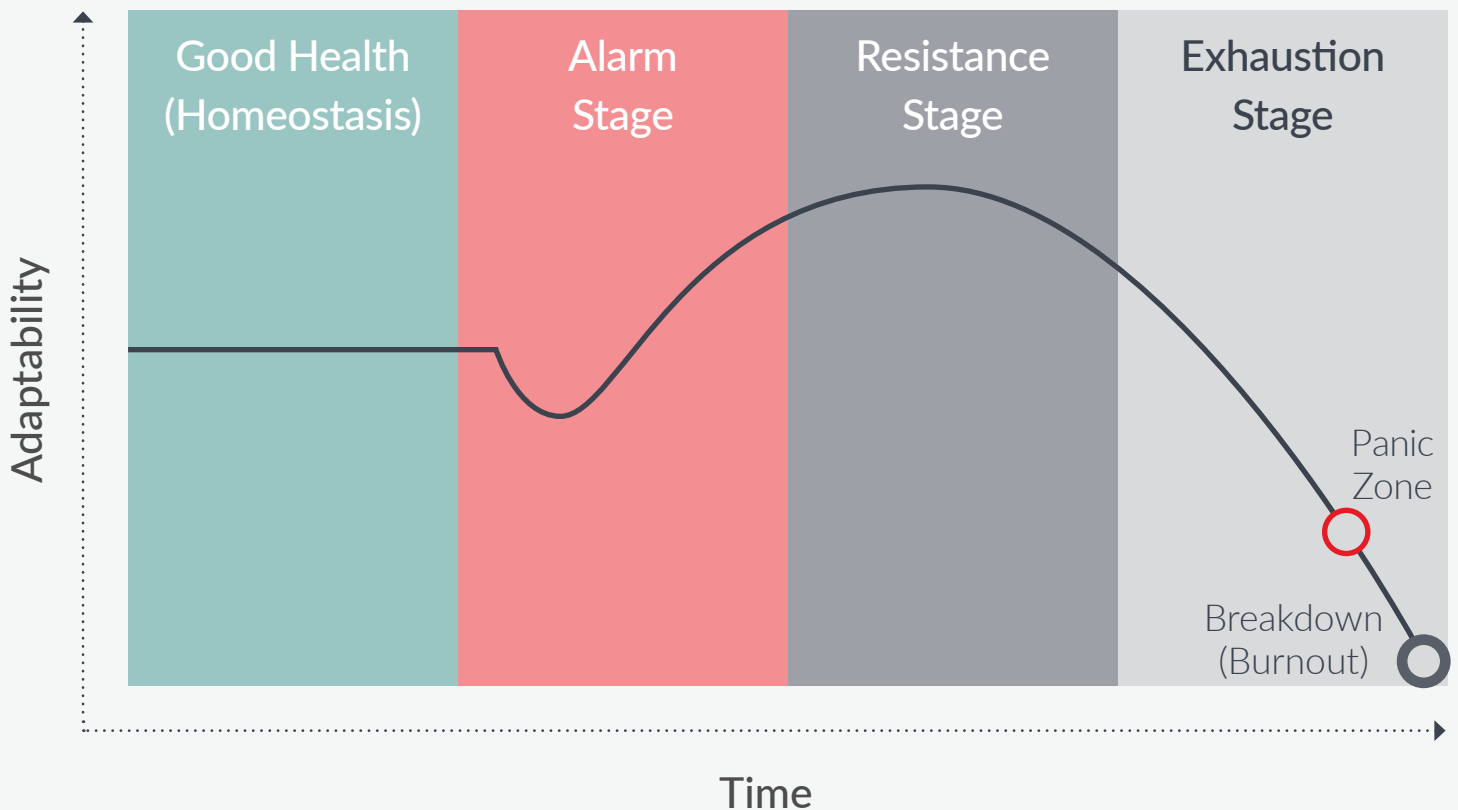
Loss of libido, lower sperm production in men, and absent or irregular menstrual cycles in women

Lower bone density

### 3. THE EXHAUSTION STAGE

When the body continues to function in this wired state (never fully returning to the rest state), your emergency resources are depleted and your body starts to shut down. This final burnout stage represents your body's inability to cope with continuously high demands. After all, it's not natural to constantly feel like you're being chased by a bear.

Below is an illustration of all three stages.

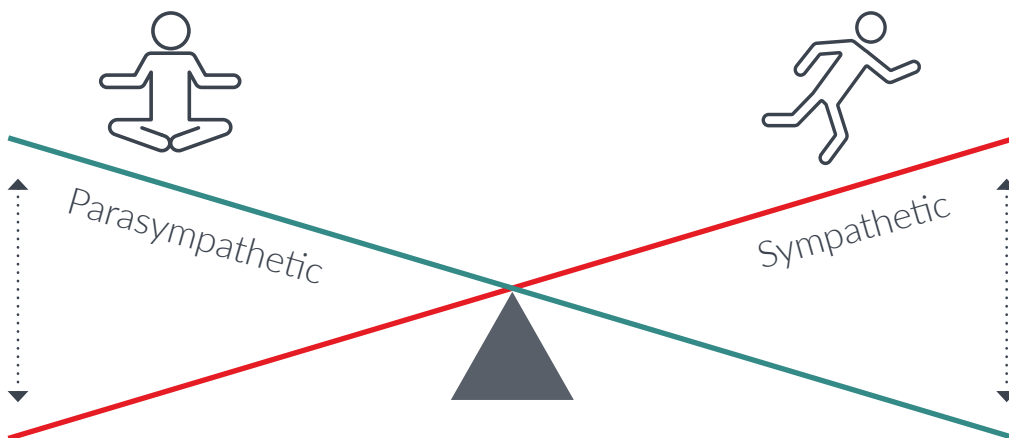


## BREAKING THE DESTRUCTIVE CYCLE OF STRESS

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Just as the sympathetic nervous system turns on the “fight or flight response,” the parasympathetic nervous system turns it off. The parasympathetic nervous system helps the body conserve energy and rest. The ability to go from “fight or flight” to “rest and digest” is critical for your well-being.

Unfortunately, a return to relaxation doesn't occur promptly for most people in today's fast-paced society. While we're all running around in panic mode from our everyday worries, chronic stress is disrupting the natural balance required for optimal health, speeding up the aging process, and increasing the body's susceptibility to illness.<sup>2</sup> Finding ways to activate the relaxation response is vital.



## TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE STRESS

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Practice calming activities like meditation and light movement, such as tai chi.



Organize your work and living spaces to be clutter-free, peaceful environments.



Plan your schedule using a daily or weekly planner.



Prioritize your tasks and focus on one thing at a time.



Delegate tasks whenever possible if you feel overwhelmed.

## FOOTNOTES

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- 1| Everly, G. S., Jr., & Lating, J. M. (2002). *A clinical guide to the treatment of the human stress response* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- 2| Rice, V. (Ed.). (2012). *Handbook of stress, coping, and health* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.