Stress, Trauma, and the Body

A compassionate introduction to body awareness, everyday stress responses, and personal choice.

Why the body matters

Stress and trauma can influence breathing, tension, attention, sleep, and the sense of being connected to yourself or your surroundings. These reactions are not a personal failure. They also are not proof that every physical symptom is caused by trauma.

Some responses you may recognize

On alert

Feeling restless, tense, watchful, or having racing thoughts.

Pulled inward

Feeling numb, disconnected, exhausted, or less responsive.

Changing over time

Experiences can vary. Quiet does not always mean comfortable.

An optional gentle check-in

1. Look around and notice one ordinary thing you can see.
2. Notice what supports you: a chair, the floor, or clothing on your skin.
3. Ask: Would I prefer a pause, movement, or to stop this exercise?
4. Make one manageable choice. There is no required result.

What if this feels uncomfortable?

Pause or skip it. Open your eyes if they were closed, orient to your surroundings, and use a preferred source of support. People with significant dissociation, recent trauma, or complex symptoms may prefer to try these skills with a qualified clinician.

When to seek additional help

If symptoms are persistent, distressing, painful, or affecting your life, consult an appropriate health professional. Physical symptoms deserve medical assessment when indicated. In an emergency, call local emergency services.

Educational self-reflection only; not psychotherapy, diagnosis, or crisis support. Stop or skip any exercise.

Inspired by: Levine, P. A. (2010), In an Unspoken Voice; Psychotherapy Networker (2018), Peter Levine master class.

Original guide © 2026 Soteldo Psychotherapy Clinic

Not affiliated with or endorsed by Peter Levine or SE International