

Identifying the Physical Signs of Your Emotions

Objective

To identify the physical signs of emotion to manage your feelings more effectively.

You Should Know

You may have heard the phrase “body-mind connection,” which refers to the relationship between your emotions and physical sensations. As you experience overwhelming emotions, you may feel uncomfortable changes in your body. These can include an increase in your heart rate or changes in your breathing, body temperature, digestion, and perspiration. Your emotions can also alter your energy level, resulting in sluggishness. Sometimes these physical reactions can intensify your already-distressing moods or lead to anxiety.

When you are aware of your physical reactions, you can begin to identify healthy ways to manage them and the emotions that cause them.

What You Should Do

The first step to increase your awareness is to track the physical signs of your emotions. For example, if you recently experienced acute anger, you might have noticed physical sensations such as throbbing temples or tightly clenched fists.

Use the following chart to identify the physical responses you experience when you have distressing or overwhelming emotions.

- Under ‘Emotion and Intensity’ label your emotion and rank its intensity from 0 – 10, where 0 = no emotion and 10 = the most uncomfortable level of intensity.
- Under ‘Heart Rate’ describe any increase or decrease, or the feeling of pounding in your chest.
- Under ‘Body Temperature’ describe any increase or decrease, and the areas affected (for example, cold hands or flushed face and neck).
- Under ‘Muscles’ describe tension, tingling, or shaking, and where this occurred.
- Under ‘Energy’ describe your level of stamina, strength, or level of calmness (for example, you are unable to sit still or you feel anxious)
- Under ‘Other’ name any other body sensations you noticed, such as sweating, loss of appetite, headache, and so forth.

Emotion and Intensity	Heart Rate	Body Temperature	Muscles	Energy	Other
<i>Anger: intensity 8</i>	<i>Pounding heart</i>	<i>Face feels hot</i>	<i>Pain in neck</i>	<i>Can't sit still</i>	<i>Queasy</i>

Which of the emotions that you listed cause you the most physical distress?

Did you notice changes in your emotions or physical sensations while completing the chart?

Describe.

What have you tried in the past to reduce or eliminate the physical discomfort?

Next, you will identify physical movements that can decrease the level of uncomfortable sensations. Research has found that as you change your body movements and posture, you can improve how you feel. Believe it or not, even a small change in your facial expression can help; for example, when you smile, it releases “feel-good” chemicals in your brain like dopamine, endorphins, and serotonin that fight stress and elevate mood.

Here are some physical movements and activities that can help you reconnect to your body while reducing uncomfortable sensations. Place a check mark next to the activities you would be most likely to do the next time you feel physical discomfort.

Engage in intense exercise, such as running, weight lifting, basketball, or CrossFit to burn off energy and stress.

Take a walk.

Stretch or practice yoga, Pilates, tai chi, or karate.

Do deep breathing exercises.

Splash cold water on your face or take a hot shower.

Get a massage.

Other activity: _____

Which of the above activities can you commit to doing when you experience uncomfortable physical reactions to your emotions? _____

Explain why you chose those activities.

Name a person you trust who can support you in regular engagement in those activities.

Reflections on This Exercise

Has this exercise changed the way you view your physical reactions to emotions? Explain.

Has this exercise changed the way you respond to overwhelming emotions?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
