

Trauma-Influenced Body Signals & What to Do

A simple guide to help you notice, understand, and respond to your body.

Body Signal	What It Might Mean	Try This
Jaw clenching / teeth grinding	Your body is bracing for something (real or remembered).	Place tongue gently on roof of mouth; take 3 slow breaths; massage jaw muscles with fingertips.
Tight shoulders / neck	Protective posture, preparing for “impact” or holding tension from past stress.	Roll shoulders gently backward 5x; stretch neck side to side; exhale slowly.
Shallow breathing / breath-holding	Nervous system thinks you need to be on alert.	Put hand on belly; inhale slowly into hand; exhale longer than inhale.
Racing heart “out of nowhere”	Your body remembers something before your mind does.	Ground feet on floor; press heels down; look around and name 3 safe things you see.
Cold hands / feet	Blood is moving to core muscles for fight/flight.	Rub hands together; squeeze fists and release; place warm cloth or blanket over feet.
Sudden heat / flush	Adrenaline rush — preparing to move or protect.	Step back from situation if possible; breathe into lower belly; drink cool water.
Upset stomach / “butterflies”	Stress hormones affecting digestion.	Place palm over belly; take 5 slow breaths; sip warm herbal tea.
Numbness or “floaty” feeling	Dissociation — body’s way of checking out from overload.	Press hands together firmly; touch textured object; stomp feet gently.
Increased sensitivity to light / sound / touch	Nervous system on high alert.	Reduce stimulation (dim lights, lower volume); use sunglasses, earplugs, or weighted items for comfort.

Body Signals in Anxiety and Depression – What They Might Mean

Body Signal	What It Might Mean	Try This
Racing heart	Nervous system thinks danger is near	Hand on chest + slow breathing (exhale longer than inhale)
Chest tightness	Emotional holding pattern or breath restriction	Gentle chest-opening stretch + grounding
Gut discomfort	Stress response or unprocessed emotion	Belly breath + warm compress or touch
Heaviness / fatigue	Depression signal or unexpressed grief	Movement snack (1–2 min stretch/walk) to reconnect
Muscle tension	Chronic stress response	Body scan to notice + release areas of gripping
Numbness / disconnection	Nervous system freeze/dissociation	Press hands together, feel feet on floor, slow blink
Tearfulness or lump in throat	Suppressed emotion surfacing	Safe expression (journaling, sound, breath, talk)

Body Signals in Diabetes & Weight Management – What They Might Mean

Body Signal	What It Might Mean	Try This
Shaky, lightheaded, or dizzy	Possible low blood sugar or skipped meal	Eat a small snack with protein and slow-release carbs (e.g., nuts and fruit)
Sudden craving for sugar or carbs	Blood sugar crash or rebound after spike	Breathe and pause; check balance of last meal (add more fiber/protein next time)
Brain fog or sluggishness	Blood sugar may be out of range, or insulin resistance	Drink water, add gentle movement, note any food or stress triggers
Feeling heavy after meals	Possibly too many fast carbs, overeating, or inflammation	Slow down at meals, note portion sizes, include fiber and protein
Bloating or gassy after meals	Digestion may be overwhelmed — too much too fast or stress-related	Eat more slowly, chew thoroughly, relax before meals
Afternoon crash or fatigue	Blood sugar dip, stress hormone crash, or protein deficiency	Plan balanced lunches, include light movement instead of more caffeine
Irritability or mood swings	Blood sugar instability or emotional regulation response	Hydrate, do a quick check-in: is it hunger or emotion?
Dry mouth or frequent urination	Could signal elevated blood sugar	Monitor glucose if diagnosed; hydrate; consult provider if persistent
Lack of hunger or fullness signals	Disconnection from internal cues due to stress, dieting, or trauma	Practice mindful eating: eat slowly, pause mid-meal, check for satiety
Hunger at same time daily	Stable metabolism and natural rhythm	Prep meals/snacks to support blood sugar and energy regulation

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