

Stress Science 101: How your thoughts stress you out

You know that feeling when your heart starts racing because something scary happens, say when a car swerves in front of you, and you have to slam on the brakes?

That's our body's natural, healthy stress response. It evolved to keep us safe from threats like lions or bears.

But unlike in our ancient ancestors' time, a lot of the threats we face today "can't be solved by fight or flight," says Amelia Nagoski, co-author of *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*.

The problem with being a modern human is the stress response doesn't just kick in from a physical threat — it's triggered by things like work deadlines or grumpy bosses.

And what's more, even our *thoughts* can stress us out. Ruminating about something stressful "can trigger that stress response over and over again," says Leah Doane, a psychologist who researches stress at Arizona State University.

If your stress response has revved up, you need to give your body a chance to wind down, so the stress doesn't become chronic. It's what Nagoski calls "completing the stress cycle."



Try this: 4 ways to release stress

1. **Movement:** Take a brisk walk or run, or go to the gym.
2. **Social connection:** Call a friend, or have a chat with your barista. "That is enough to tell your body that the world is a safe place," says Nagoski.
3. **A good cry:** Crying "increases serotonin and endorphins which will help you feel calmer," says Doane. Watching a tear-jerker may work, too.
4. **Also try: acts of creative expression,** be it making art or decorating a cake. Or find a loved one and go in for a 20-second (or more!) hug.