

Uncle Your Body

Overwhelm does not live only in our thoughts. The body can hold pressure long before we consciously recognise how stressed, overloaded or exhausted we have become. A clenched jaw, raised shoulders, tight hands, a rigid stomach, shallow breathing or toes gripping inside your shoes can become so familiar that you stop noticing them. This resource is an invitation to notice rather than force: to see where your body may be working harder than it needs to right now.

Start with noticing, not correcting

You do not have to make your body relax. Trying too hard to calm down can become another demand. Instead, begin by noticing what is happening. Is your jaw pressed together? Are your shoulders lifted? Are your hands gripping something? Is your forehead tense? Are you holding your breath while reading, concentrating or waiting? Awareness gives you information. If your body wants to soften after you notice, allow it; if it does not, you have still learned something useful.

The jaw and shoulders

Stress commonly shows itself around the jaw, neck and shoulders. Let your teeth separate slightly if that feels comfortable. Notice where your tongue is resting. Allow your shoulders to move down only as far as feels natural. You can gently roll them or change position. The aim is not a perfect posture. It is to interrupt the unconscious effort of bracing.

Hands, feet and contact with the ground

Notice whether your hands are clenched, your toes are curled or your legs are held rigidly. If it feels comfortable, open your hands and let your feet make fuller contact with the floor. Feel the chair, bed or ground supporting your weight. This is not about convincing yourself that everything is fine. It is a simple way of giving your attention a physical point of reference.

Breathing without pressure

You do not need to take enormous deep breaths. For some people, being told to breathe deeply can feel uncomfortable or even increase anxiety. Instead, simply notice your natural breath. If it feels helpful, allow the out-breath to become a little longer or softer. There is no target to reach and no correct rhythm.

Why the body matters during overwhelm

When we are under sustained pressure, the nervous system may remain prepared for action even when there is no immediate task to complete. Muscles can stay tense and attention can remain alert for the next demand. Small moments of physical release will not remove the circumstances causing stress, but they may reduce some of the additional effort your body is using to brace against them.

Your Body Check-In

Move through this slowly. You can stop at any point. The purpose is not to scan your body for something wrong; it is to notice what your body may be communicating about the amount of pressure you are carrying.

Face and jaw

Notice your forehead, eyes, mouth and jaw. Are you frowning, squinting or pressing your teeth together? What happens if you allow even five percent less effort?

Shoulders, arms and hands

Where are your shoulders sitting? Are your hands gripping your phone, clothing, a pen or each other? Try changing their position and notice whether that feels different.

Chest, stomach and breathing

Notice whether you are holding your stomach tightly or breathing high in your chest. You do not need to change anything immediately. Give yourself a moment to observe what your body has been doing while your attention was elsewhere.

Legs and feet

Are your legs rigid, bouncing or crossed tightly? Are your toes gripping? Notice the support underneath you. A small position change, stretch or gentle movement may feel more useful than trying to sit perfectly still.

What does my body need next?

The answer may be movement, quiet, warmth, food, water, rest, a change of position, less sensory input or simply not being asked to do another thing for a few minutes. Try to respond to the information rather than judging it.

Message from Maggie

Sometimes we do not realise how tightly we are holding ourselves together until somebody gives us permission to notice. You do not have to force your body into calm. Start by finding one place where you can use a little less effort. Unclench one hand. Drop one shoulder. Let your jaw soften. A small release is still a release.

When tension is persistent or painful

Ongoing or painful muscle tension can have many causes. If tension, pain, headaches, jaw problems, breathing difficulties or other physical symptoms are persistent, worsening or concerning, seek advice from an appropriate healthcare professional rather than assuming they are caused by stress alone.