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WELLNESS

Stress & the Nervous System

Calm Your Body, Ease Your Pain

The connection between chronic stress, nervous system function, and pain.

A free patient education guide from our doctors
(630) 289-2225 · freedomwellness.llc · Hoffman Estates, IL

Welcome

Stress is part of life. Deadlines, finances, family, and traffic all trigger your body's alarm system. That response is useful in short bursts, but when it never fully switches off, it can show up in your body as tight shoulders, headaches, poor sleep, and stubborn pain.

Understanding how stress affects your nervous system is the first step toward taking back control.

Fight-or-Flight vs. Rest-and-Digest

Your autonomic nervous system has two main modes. The sympathetic branch prepares you for action: heart rate rises, breathing quickens, and muscles tense. The parasympathetic branch helps you rest, digest, and recover.

Health depends on moving smoothly between the two. Chronic stress keeps the accelerator pressed, leaving your body stuck in a state of high alert.

How Stress Shows Up in Your Body

- Tight neck, shoulders, and jaw
- Tension headaches
- Shallow, chest-dominant breathing
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Digestive upset
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Fatigue and irritability

The Stress-Pain Cycle

Stress increases muscle tension and can heighten how the nervous system processes pain signals. Pain, in turn, is stressful. Over time, this loop can make discomfort feel bigger and last longer. Breaking the cycle means addressing both the physical tension and the stress behind it.

How Chiropractic Care Can Help

Our care focuses on reducing physical tension, restoring healthy movement, and improving posture and breathing mechanics. Many patients report feeling more relaxed and sleeping better after adjustments. Combined with the lifestyle strategies below, care can be a meaningful part of your stress-management toolkit.

Daily Tools to Calm Your System

- **Diaphragmatic breathing:** 5 minutes of slow belly breathing, twice daily
- **Move your body:** walking, yoga, or strength training most days
- **Get outside:** time in nature and daylight
- **Protect your sleep:** consistent bedtime and wake time
- **Connect:** time with people who lift you up
- **Set boundaries:** with work email and screens after hours

Try This Now

Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly. Breathe in slowly through your nose so only the lower hand rises. Exhale longer than you inhale. Five breaths can shift how you feel.

Stress-Reset Checklist

- ☐ Two breathing breaks a day
- ☐ 30 minutes of movement
- ☐ Time outdoors
- ☐ Screen-free hour before bed
- ☐ Unclench jaw and drop shoulders
- ☐ Ask for support when needed

Common Questions

Can stress really cause physical pain?

Stress can increase muscle tension and pain sensitivity, contributing to real physical symptoms.

When should I seek mental health support?

If stress, anxiety, or low mood interfere with daily life, talk with a licensed mental health professional. You are not alone.

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YOUR NEXT STEP

Let's get you feeling your best again.

Let us help you release the tension. Call (630) 289-2225 to schedule.

Book Now: (630) 289-2225

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