

Clinical Signs and Symptoms Profiles Associated With Combat Stress Reactions (CSRs)¹

Combat Stress Reactions (CSRs) are normal, involuntary, temporary reactions to extremely stressful combat-related events. CSRs are the body's expected survival responses that encompass physical, behavioral, emotional, mental, and other changes in body processes. Although not an exhaustive list, below are examples of signs and symptoms that may be associated with two different CSR clinical profiles.²

POWER UP: Arousal

- ▲ Intense increase in heart rate (heart pounding, palpitations)
 - ▲ Sudden, marked rise in blood pressure
 - ▲ Fast and deep breathing
 - ▲ Supercharged energy level; incredibly strong with high to rigid muscle tone
 - ▲ Rise in body temperature, increased sweating
 - ▲ Dry mouth and dry eyes
 - ▲ Enlarged pupils, better distance vision
 - ▲ Decreased appetite and digestive activity
 - ▲ Reduced urinary and bowel elimination
 - ▲ Dizziness, lightheadedness
 - ▲ Difficulty falling or staying asleep; nightmares
 - ▲ Goosebumps or muscle jerks, twitches
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- ▲ Extreme agitation, restlessness, or recklessness in behavior
 - ▲ Over-excitement and possible arguing, fighting, or rowdiness within unit
 - ▲ Intense emotionally-driven behaviors such as temper outbursts, panic attacks, crying, fleeing
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- ▲ Intense anger, fear, or euphoria; rapid mood swings
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- ▲ Rapid thinking with thoughts initially occurring fast and clear but becoming too fast, causing confusion, memory problems, poor judgement, and difficulty understanding language
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- ▲ Hyperalertness and hyperarousal
 - ▲ Single-mindedness and over-focused on the threat
 - ▲ Exaggerated startle response
 - ▲ Feelings of unreality, e.g., may feel as if outside of body
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- ▲ Loud, rapid speech, or stuttering
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- ▲ Exaggerated or more vivid sight, hearing, or feeling
 - ▲ Tingling of body parts
 - ▲ Reduced ability to feel physical pain (non-opioid system)

POWER DOWN: Shutdown

EVIDENCE OF PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

- ▼ Dramatic decrease in heart rate
- ▼ Sudden, significant drop in blood pressure, which can lead to fainting
- ▼ Slow and shallow breathing, shortness of breath
- ▼ Drained energy level; incredibly weak with limp muscle tone
- ▼ Drop in body temperature, shivering
- ▼ Increased saliva and tears
- ▼ Pupils becoming much smaller; fixed, glassy gaze
- ▼ Increased appetite and digestive activity
- ▼ Increased urinary and bowel elimination (incontinence)
- ▼ Nausea/vomiting
- ▼ Sleepiness
- ▼ Uncontrollable shaking

BEHAVIORAL

- ▼ Becoming frozen, unable to move, e.g., paralyzed, collapsed
- ▼ Social withdrawal, unresponsiveness, disconnected from unit
- ▼ Lack of emotionally-appropriate behaviors to danger

EMOTIONAL

- ▼ Extreme fear, hopelessness, followed by numbness or lack of emotions

MENTAL

- ▼ Sluggish thinking with thoughts arising too slowly or shutting down entirely, causing disorientation, memory loss, and inability to make decisions or understand language

AWARENESS/AROUSAL

- ▼ Lack of awareness of and non-responsiveness to self, others, or surroundings
- ▼ Powerlessness to focus on or respond to immediate threats
- ▼ Loss of startle response and other reflexes
- ▼ Little to no sense of reality (loss of sense of self and world)

SPEECH

- ▼ Soft speech, mumbling, or incapacity to speak

SENSORIMOTOR

- ▼ Inability to see, hear, or feel
- ▼ Numbness of body parts
- ▼ Failure to feel physical pain (opioid system)

¹Primary reference: Schauer, M., & Elbert, T. (2010). Dissociation following traumatic stress. *Journal of Psychology*, 218 (2), 109–127 ²Please note: Some of the clinical signs and symptoms associated with CSRs are the same signs and symptoms associated with other important and even life threatening conditions. Assessment by a licensed independent medical provider must be done for determination of cause of symptoms, any further workup and/or treatment that may be required, and consideration of a return to duty.