

A stylized graphic of a flame in shades of teal and light blue, with the main body of the flame in a darker teal color.

The Ultimate Guide to Flare-Ups

How to Calm a Flare-Up

Observe

Take a few minutes in a quiet place to tune into your body. Notice the body's initial response to this flare-up. Allow whatever is coming up. Notice each sensation and emotion without judgment or fear.



Reset the Nervous System

- Shift the language you use to describe your symptoms, making it as neutral as possible.

Recommended exercise in the Curable app: Word Swap

- Interrupt the brain's fight-or-flight activation by reminding the brain that you are safe and taking slow, deep breaths.

- Send signals of safety to your brain with a meditation or visualization exercise.

Recommended exercise in the Curable app: Safe Place



Get Curious

Consider the non-physical factors that may have caused or contributed to this flare-up. Think about the past week and the week you have ahead and ask yourself:

What's changing in your mind?
What's changing in your body?
What's changing around you?

Remind your brain that all of these changes, both the positive ones and the challenging ones, are safe.



Keep Going

- Resist the temptation to shut down and avoid plans or activities.
- Continue with your days as much as you can, even if you're only able to get through a fraction of what you intended to.
- Don't cancel plans "just in case" - try them out, knowing that you are safe and you can always go home if things get worse.
- Remember that this is temporary. Expect that symptoms will come and when they do, you will be prepared to handle them by going through these steps again.



Activity:

Create Your Safe Place

When symptoms become chronic, the brain becomes hypervigilant (and over-responsive!) to potential threats. This is one reason why “triggers” tend to intensify as time goes on. To reverse this effect, it is important to cultivate a sense of safety in the brain and body. Use the space below to draw a place (real or imagined) that makes you feel completely safe and at ease. Next time you feel your brain kicking into danger mode, imagine that you are there.



Worksheet:

Symptom Curiosity

When symptoms flare-up, the natural response from the brain is to ask “why.”

Why is this happening? Why now? Why there? Most humans have been conditioned to seek these answers in the physical, and to conclude that something must be very wrong in the tissues of their body. Sometimes, that is true. Sometimes, it is not.

When symptoms become chronic and flare-ups are more frequent, it is likely that a flare-up is being caused (or exacerbated) by a learned response in the brain and nervous system. In other words, the brain is perceiving something (a thought, emotion, or situation) as a threat. To get to the bottom of what your brain is afraid of, complete the worksheet below.

What’s changing in your mind?

Make a list of all the thoughts and emotions you’ve experienced in the past week that could possibly make your brain feel unsafe - rational or not.

What’s changing in your body?

Over the past week, can you think of any times when your body felt more tense than usual, or when symptoms began to flare up? Write down what you were doing, feeling, and thinking during these times. Write down where you were and who you were with. Look for any patterns.

What's changing around you?

Think about the past week and the week ahead. What changes (both positive and challenging) have been happening around you? Include changes related to your relationships, career, physical environment, upcoming or past events and anything else that feels important to you.



Circle each change that your brain could possibly perceive as a threat.

Remember that positive changes can be intimidating and scary to the brain, too!

Write a note to your brain explaining why you are capable of handling these changes without the help of your fight-or-flight system.

