

justme

# "I'm Having a Breakdown!"

Stop the bad behavior before it takes over

by Jennifer Matlack



I'll admit it: I'm not the nicest person when I'm under pressure. Last week, my husband brought some sliced cantaloupe into my office while I was furiously typing under the pressure of a deadline. A normal person would have said, "Thanks, honey!" My response? "I'm right in the middle of something. Leave me alone."

For me, stress incites habitual knee-jerk reactions, usually in the form of sudden, angry outbursts. Other people's reactions may last longer—from an all-afternoon

eating binge to a hiatus from exercise that lasts from days to weeks.

"When you're stressed you lose focus and revert to familiar coping habits that don't serve you well in the long run," says Jane Hart, M.D., a clinical instructor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland.

How do you cope when you're under pressure? Here are the six most common knee-jerk reactions, the reasons behind them and how to deal so that stress doesn't get the best of you.

## BREAKDOWN BEHAVIOR

### Bye-bye treadmill

**WHY YOU DO IT** "You become so locked into a tense cycle that you forget the benefit of your workout," says Debbie Mandel, author of *Changing Habits: The Caregivers' Total Workout*. When you skip your routine for a week or more, you lose your initial drive, as well as the momentum that's been keeping you going, making it hard to get back on track.

**HOW TO FIX IT** Develop an alternative plan. Instead of giving up your daily three-mile run or 45-minute yoga class, spend only 15 minutes exercising. You're still moving your body and getting the benefit, but the idea doesn't sound so daunting to a stressed-out cranium. For hectic days at the office, give yourself permission to walk to the local deli rather than phoning in an order, or simply take a walk around the parking lot. "Even five or 10 minutes of exercise will help clear your head," says Debbie.