EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

(A companion to The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer’s Guide to Character Expression)

As writers, our job is to create a meaningful emotional experience for readers. One of the best ways to do this is to convey the quality and depth of our characters’ feelings through their thoughts, body language, and visceral reactions. This is the primary focus of The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer’s Guide to Character Expression and is at the root of the “show don’t tell” principle. When readers are pulled in by emotional intensity, they can’t help but fall in love with our characters and their stories.

But the writer’s bag of tricks is never full. There’s always another device, another method to help us achieve our goals. Enter Emotion Amplifiers, a collection of 15 states that naturally galvanize emotion and make a character more volatile.

The beauty of emotion is that it can be manipulated by internal and external stimuli—circumstances that amplify what a character is feeling. Hunger or extreme heat can increase strain and deplete the body to the point where goals seem insurmountable. Stress can unbalance the most stable of characters, opening them up to raw emotion, rash decisions and ultimately, mistakes that send them on a crash course with disaster.

Amplifiers also can evoke memory for readers because of their commonality. At some point, every reader has felt a burst of energy that propels them to tackle a task, or has experienced pain that sends a jarring throb through flesh and bone. Universal experiences like these help forge an empathetic link between reader and character.

Written thoughtfully, the difficulties that arise from an amplifier will trigger a stronger emotional response that feels both authentic and credible. Compromising your character’s physical and mental state also creates tension, planting doubt in the reader’s mind about the hero’s ability to succeed.

A PRACTICAL NOTE

Each emotion amplifier will provide you with ideas on how different stressors might affect your character, priming them—and, therefore, the reader—for a more intense emotional experience. Like The Emotion Thesaurus, these entries list the physical signals, internal sensations, and mental responses associated with each amplifier. Simply decide which stressor to deploy, then browse the selection of cues to help you create a fresh response that fits your character perfectly. Just as characters show emotion uniquely, they should also respond in their own way to the different amplifiers.

Ready to crank up the stress and force a bigger emotional reaction? Let’s see how discomfort and inconvenience can create a more poignant opportunity to show your character’s true feelings.
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ADDICTION

DEFINITION: the compulsive need for a substance, marked by acute physiological symptoms upon the source’s withdrawal

*Note: Though people can be addicted to any number of things, for clarity, this entry has been limited to the cues associated with substance addictions.

Physical Signals:
Poor hygiene (yellowing teeth, chipped nails)
Sallow skin
Bloodshot, glassy, dull, or red eyes
Dilated or contracted pupils
Impaired coordination
Manic activity
Sudden weight loss or gain
Suspicious odors on the breath, clothing, or skin
Tremors
Slurred speech
Not showing up to appointments or social engagements
Financial difficulties (not making rent, having a car repossessed)
Asking others for money
Stealing
Neglecting responsibilities at work or school
Broken relationships
Leaving old friends and clinging to new groups of people
Difficulty keeping a job
Evasive speech
A spaced-out appearance
Spending unusually long periods of time asleep or awake
Decreased eye contact
Delinquent or criminal activity
Driving under the influence
Manipulating others to get what one wants
A life categorized by high drama

Internal Sensations:
Feeling hyper or jumpy
Lethargy or fatigue
Impaired vision
Dry mouth
Twitchy nerves and muscles
Increased sensitivity to sound, texture, taste, and smells

Mental Responses:

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Fixating on the source
Counting the minutes until the next hit
A sense of euphoria upon using
A need to use more to get the same experience a lesser amount used to provide
A lack of motivation
Mood swings, aggression
Memory loss
Impaired judgment
An inability to account for large chunks of time
Guilt, regret
Self pity, self-loathing
Suicidal thoughts

Cues of Suppressed Addiction:
Denial
Making excuses for absences or tardiness
Lying
Misdirection; blaming others
Hiding track marks by wearing long sleeves
Using eye drops, mints, or mouthwash to mask odors and tell-tale signs
Demanding more privacy (locking doors, withdrawing from others)
Sneaky behavior (sneaking out, hiding substances around the house)

Withdrawal Symptoms:
Tremors in the extremities
Racing heart, heart palpitations
Shortness of breath
Nausea and vomiting
Hallucinations, paranoia
Anxiety
Poor concentration
Restlessness, irritability
Headaches
Sleeplessness
Depression
Seizures

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**Writer’s Tip:** When writing about a situation that is outside of one’s experience, consult the experts. Textbooks, professionals in the field, or friends with personal knowledge can provide the details needed to write credibly about the event.

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DEFINITION: having the ability or power to evoke interest or pleasure

**Physical Signals:**
Eyes that follow the source of attraction
Staring
The body going still
Dilated pupils
Touching the mouth, drawing attention to the lips
Adjusting one’s posture or preening to draw attention
Mirroring the other person’s movements, gestures, and posture
Furtively watching
Asking about the other person
Flirting
Eyes that smolder with intensity
Angling the body towards the other person
Giving a little wave
Finding opportunities for “accidental touches”
Touching the hair, smoothing one’s clothes, straightening a collar
Playing hard-to-get
Paying compliments
Thrusting out the chest
Eyes going wide
Exposing the neck
Licking one’s lips
Playfully asking double entendre questions
Questions that grow more personal in nature
Affectionate touches (bumping knees, squeezing a hand)
Sitting side-by-side so the legs or shoulders touch
Offering one’s undivided attention
Asking questions out of a true fascination and desire to know more
An open gaze, directly meeting the other person’s eyes
Talking to friends about the other person
Losing interest in everything else when the other person enters the room
Giving a low whistle or mumbling an exclamation
Becoming tongue-tied, fumbling for words
Grasping at any attempt to make conversation

**Internal Sensations:**
A fluttering in the belly
Knees that wobble, tremble, or feel weak
The mouth flooding with moisture

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An overall tingling
Feeling energized
Breath stopping or catching in the throat
An almost electrical feeling upon meeting the person’s eyes
The air rushing out of the body
Feeling an emotional or spiritual connection with the other person
An increase in body temperature

**Mental Responses:**
A willingness to step outside one’s comfort zone to obtain
Boldness or forwardness
A desire to touch
Viewing everything the source does as highly interesting
Only seeing the positive in the other person
Striving to be witty or charming
Dreaming of the other person at night
Daydreaming or fantasizing about them
Seeking out opportunities to meet or be with the other person
Speechlessness
Fuzzy thinking
Excitement
Optimism
Sexual thoughts

**Cues of Suppressed Attraction:**
Finding ways to be near the person but not engaging with them
Denial of any feelings
Ramping up an existing relationship to support the idea that you’re not interested
Asking subtle questions about the other person
Flushed cheeks
Avoiding the other person
Dismissive gestures and comments
Not making eye contact
Befriending the other person’s friends to obtain access
Subtly watching the other person
Fiddling with things when the other person is around, jumpiness
The voice cracking or rising in pitch
Sweating

**Writer’s Tip:** With a strong reactive state like attraction, be aware that one’s expressions will vary according to sex, age, and experience.
DEFINITION: the state of being weary through dullness or lack of stimulation

Physical Signals:
Resting the chin in the hand
Staring off into space
Half-closed eyes
Sleeping or dosing
The chin resting on the chest
Head thrown back, eyes staring at the ceiling
Limp posture
Slouched in a chair, arms dangling
Restless movements (rolling the neck, foot-tapping)
Engaging in small talk with people nearby
People watching
Eating or drinking out of a desire to do something
Flipping through brochures or other reading material at hand
Frequent trips outside or to the bathroom
Flipping TV channels
Aimless wandering or pacing
Texting or web-surfing on the phone
A raised voice
Quick laughter
Complaining
Whining
Yawning
Doodling
Wandering attention
Participating in mundane activities out of desperation
Becoming productive out of a desire to do something
Jumping at any opportunity that arises
List-making
Indulging in habits (picking at nails, scratching)
Destructiveness (shredding paper, bending paperclips, peeling the label from a beer bottle)

Internal Sensations:
Lethargy
Hyperactivity
Heaviness in the muscles
A jittery feeling in the extremities
Feeling antsy

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Mental Responses:
The mind cycling through options of what to do
Daydreaming
Seeking out others, even people one normally wouldn’t pursue
Negative thoughts
Feeling as if time has slowed down
Difficulty concentrating

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Boredom:
Purposely irritating others as a way to entertain oneself
Pulling pranks
Getting into trouble at school
Throwing oneself into a new hobby or project
Increased exercise
Frustration
Impatience
Apathy
Depression
Sitting or staying in one place for long periods of time
Self-pity
A feeling of worthlessness
A desire for purpose

Cues of Suppressed Boredom:
Overcommitting
Constant motion
Becoming determined to have a good time
Adhering to a strict routine so there will always be something to do
Jumping to a new activity at the first sign of disinterest
Talkativeness; incessantly calling others just to chat

Writer’s Tip: No one likes to be bored, but this trait doesn’t have to be a negative one. Turn it into a positive by using it as a catalyst that pushes your character into uncovering a truth, discovering a new passion, or mending an existing fault in society.
**COLD**

**DEFINITION:** having or being exposed to an uncomfortably low temperature

**Physical Signals:**
- Shivering
- Blue lips
- Yawning
- Eyes that tear up
- Chattering teeth
- Tingling extremities
- Stuttering speech
- Skin that’s uncomfortably cold to the touch
- Dry, cracked lips
- A stiff jaw that makes speech difficult
- A burning sensation in the skin
- Clumsiness
- Slow, shallow breaths
- Lips that tremble
- Wrapping the arms around the torso
- Jumping, shuffling, or dancing to get the blood flowing
- Clapping one’s hands, stamping one’s feet
- Shoving the hands deep into the pockets
- Red and swollen patches on the skin (chilblains)
- Pulling the limbs tightly in to the core
- Slurred speech
- Rubbing the hands together
- Tucking the hands into the armpits
- Pulling a collar or scarf up over the face
- Huddling inside a jacket
- Rounded shoulders, the chin dropped down to the chest
- White or blue skin that goes numb
- Squeezed-shut eyes
- Turning one’s back to the wind
- Pulling down the sleeves to cover the hands
- Curling and uncurling one’s toes to get the blood flowing
- Rubbing one’s legs, using friction to create warmth
- Quivering breaths
- Slapping oneself
- Shaking out the arms and legs
- Flexing the fingers
- Taking deep breaths in an effort to wake up

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Curling into a ball, making oneself small
Sharing body heat with others
Blowing into cupped hands to warm them

**Internal Sensations:**
Low energy
Fatigue, drowsiness
The feeling of even your insides being cold
A weakened pulse
Nausea
Loss of appetite
A burning sensation in the lungs when inhaling
A voice that loses strength

**Mental Responses:**
Confusion
Muddled thinking
Impaired decision-making
A desire to sleep
Apathy

**Cues of Acute or Long-Term Cold Exposure:**
Frostbite
Hypothermia
Gangrene
Limb amputation
Coma
Heart failure
Death

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**Writer’s Tip:** Emotional attitude makes a difference when dealing with the cold. A person who can maintain mental acuity and focus will withstand the elements much better than someone whose mental condition is compromised by negativity.
DEHYDRATION

DEFINITION: an abnormal depletion of water from the body, often as a result of sickness or physical activity

Physical Signals:
Dry, sticky mouth
Crying without tears
Dry skin
Cracked lips
Hair that is fragile and breaks easily
Sunken eyes
Weak muscles
Pale “stringy” veins that are hard to see under the skin
Wavering when standing
Weaving when walking
Searching out sources of water
Gulping water when it becomes available
Shortness of breath
Decreased muscle coordination
Trembling extremities
Decreased productivity
A slower work pace
The inability to physically do what one used to be able to do
Taking more rest breaks
Stooped posture
A shorter stride
Arms that hang loosely at the sides

Internal Sensations:
Thirst
Decreased urine production or output
Constipation
The need to sit or lie down
Nausea
Dizziness, faintness
Light-headedness
Headache
Muscle cramps
Scratchy throat

Mental Responses:
Fatigue

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Irritability
A mental fixation on getting something to drink
Reduced mental acuity

**Cues of Acute or Long-Term Dehydration:**
Extreme thirst
A voice that grows whispy, lacking strength
Confusion
Little or no sweat production
Amber-colored urine
Skin that appears shriveled and lacks elasticity
Low blood pressure
Elevated heartbeat and rapid breathing
Fever
Delirium
Shock
Unconsciousness
Organ failure
Death

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**Writer’s Tip:** Depending on the age and size of a person, dehydration can become serious quite quickly. If it factors into your scene, make sure to research the effects on the body to maintain authenticity.
DISTRACTION

DEFINITION: mental preoccupation that makes focusing difficult

Physical Signals:
Gazing off at nothing
Not answering when a response is requested
Doing jobs half-heartedly
Lateness
A slack expression, the mouth slightly agape
Forgetting appointments and meetings
A general state of disorganization
Performing poorly at work or school
An inability to complete menial tasks (burning dinner, leaving clothes to mildew in the dryer)
Clothes that are buttoned up wrong
Arriving at a destination and realizing that something has been forgotten
Bumping into people or things
Forgetting to shave
Trailing off while speaking
A look of extreme concentration in an effort to pay attention
Losing interest in hobbies or pastimes
Wearing mismatched or dirty clothes
Dropping or knocking things over
Oversleeping
Avoiding social situations
Attending social events but not joining in (standing to the side, hanging out by the snacks)
Being included in conversations but not participating
Clumsiness
Forgetting the basics (doors left unlocked, losing track of one’s things)
A seeming preoccupation with oneself
A perception of being snobby or standoffish generated by the inability to engage
Difficulty falling asleep
Asking people to repeat themselves
Apologizing or making excuses for inattention
Kids or employees getting away with more than normal because of decreased monitoring

Internal Sensations:
Hunger pangs from not eating
Dry throat from thirst
Cramped muscles from a lack of movement or stretching

Mental Responses:
Forgetting to eat

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A gnawing feeling, wanting the situation to be resolved
Losing the thread of conversations
Obsessing over the cause of the distraction
An inability to focus on the work at hand
Avoiding situations where concentration is required
Scattered thoughts, the mind jumping from one thing to another
Thoughts turning inward to one’s own problems or decisions to be made

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Distraction:
Decreased intimacy with friends
Loved ones voicing concern
Repercussions at school or work for poor performance
Careless driving (running stop signs, changing lanes without looking)
Accidents resulting from inattention (cutting oneself with a knife, burning a finger on a hot plate)

Writer’s Tip: Distraction can be caused by mental or physical fatigue, but more often it is the result of the mind being focused on an unresolved emotional situation. Make sure that the reader always understands the cause of the distraction and the root emotion at play.
EXHAUSTION

**DEFINITION:** the state of being extremely or completely tired

**Physical Signals:**
Heavy eyelids
A head that droops, as if it’s wobbling on the neck
Eyes involuntarily drifting shut
Bloodshot eyes, red-rimmed
Bags or circles under the eyes
Swaying from side to side
Sagging in a chair
Speech that trails off
Hands hanging limply
An unkempt appearance
Poor communication (repeating things, incoherence, thoughts trailing off)
Disorganization
Falling asleep in odd places at odd times
Sleeping a lot or not sleeping enough
A subdued voice
Unshaven cheeks (men)
Muttering, mumbling
Slouching, leaning, shoulders bowing over the chest
Yawning
Eyes tearing up
Rumpled clothing
Clumsiness, fumbling
Slurred words
Forgetfulness
A distant look or glaze in the eyes
Supporting the head with a hand
Laying the head on the arms
Tipping the head back and briefly closing the eyes
Rubbing at one’s face and eyes
Slowed reaction time
Laying the head down on a desk to “rest one’s eyes”
Jolting at sudden sounds (phone ringing, door slamming)
Inappropriate responses (laughter that’s hard to stop, bursting into tears, aggression)
Slumped posture
Dragging steps, shoes that scuff the floor with each step

**Internal Sensations:**
Scratchy eyes

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Blurred vision  
Heaviness in the limbs  
Weighted eyelids  
Ringing in the ears, sounds coming as if from very far away  
Lack of appetite  
Slowed breathing and heartbeat  
Heavy muscles, bone-weariness  
Dulled senses  
Heartburn from too much coffee

**Mental Responses:**  
Difficulty focusing  
Wanting or needing to sit or lie down  
Impatience  
Inattention  
Lack of interest in hobbies and activities

**Cues of Acute or Long-Term Exhaustion:**  
Depression  
Hyper-sensitive emotions  
Crying  
Loud snoring  
Irritability  
Impaired judgment  
An inability to think clearly  
Passivity, letting others take the lead  
Forgetfulness  
Poor performance at school or work  
Falling asleep at inappropriate or dangerous times (while driving, etc.)

**Cues of Suppressed Exhaustion:**  
Increased use of stimulants (coffee, energy drinks, loud music, drugs)  
Constant motion so as to avoid any situation where one might fall asleep  
Using products to cover physical signs (eye drops, cosmetics)  
Offering excuses for tiredness (work, projects, loud parties next door)  
Lightly slapping one’s cheeks to “wake up”

**Writer’s Tip:** Take advantage of a weakened character to create further conflict. When a person’s physical or mental condition is compromised, it leads to poor judgment and mistakes.
HEAT

DEFINITION: experiencing excessive external and/or internal heat

Physical Signals:
Flushed skin
Sweat
Chapped lips
Squinting or closing one’s eyes
Fanning oneself with a hat or book
Peeling off excess clothing
Rolling up pants and long sleeves
Pulling a cap low to shield the face from the sun
Splotchy skin
Flapping the front of one’s shirt to cool the body
Weakened steps
Arms hanging limply at one’s sides
Shuffling
Swaying on one’s feet, an unsteady gait
Panting or wheezing
Fainting
Turning toward even the faintest of breezes, trying to catch some relief
Heat rash
A puffy look
Large sweat patches on one’s clothing
Increased body odor
Sunburn
Swollen feet and ankles
Eyes that appear sunken
Peeling skin
Clumsiness, lack of coordination
Falling down
Sweat-dark hair
Frizzy hair if humidity is a factor
Blotting at face and neck with a towel or tissue
Shielding one’s head with whatever is at hand

Internal Sensations:
A dry or sticky mouth
Hot skin
A tongue that feels swollen
Blurred vision

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Blood pounding in the skull
Lightheadedness, dizziness
Nausea and vomiting
Muscle weakness
Muscle cramps and spasms
Headaches
Lethargy
Excessive thirst
Rapid heartbeat
Fatigue
Muscles that feel weighted

**Mental Responses:**
Confusion
Irritability
An inability to think clearly
Lack of focus
Fantasizing about water
Single-minded focus on finding shade or a reprieve from the heat

**Cues of Acute or Long-Term Heat:**
Elevated body temperature
Stripping down, ceasing to care about appearance or modesty
Hostility, rage
Impaired decision-making
Skin that ceases to sweat
Dark-colored urine
Pale or bluish skin
Seizures
Brain damage
Loss of consciousness
Death

**Writer’s Tip:** Heat is a natural amplifier, the perfect catalyst for pushing ordinary people to anger and violence. But characters and readers need a respite from the heat every once in awhile. Give them a break periodically by providing relief, a chance to rest and recharge so they’re better able to jump back into battle when the temperature rises again.

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HUNGER

DEFINITION: having a desire or vital need for food

Physical Signals:
Trembling hands
Licking the lips
Staring at food
Chewing at one’s lips
Breathing in deeply to catch the scent of food
Openly watching others eat
Moaning or groaning at the sight of food
Swallowing often
Begging
Quivering limbs
Moving closer to the food source
Nose twitching, catching the scent
Lips that are slightly parted
Talking about food constantly
Fingers twitching involuntarily toward food sources
Touching or rubbing the stomach
Arms cradling the stomach
Overeating when food becomes available
Cramming food into one’s mouth with no thought for propriety or table manners
Dozing
Chewing on a stick or grass stalk to mimic eating

Internal Sensations:
An empty, gnawing feeling in the belly
The stomach twisting in knots
Dry mouth
A gurgling in the belly
Nausea
An over-sensitive sense of smell
Quick salivation at the sight or scent of food
Lightheadedness
Headaches, migraines
Stomach pain, a hollow ache

Mental Responses:
Obsessive thoughts of food
Lack of focus
Lethargy

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The feeling that even little actions are too hard
An inability to concentrate
Impulsiveness and impulse buying regarding food
Desperation

**Cues of Acute or Long-Term Hunger:**
Distended midsection
Weight loss, emaciation
A willingness to commit violence for food
Clothes hanging on one’s frame
Bony shoulders, fingers, or legs
Hollowed-out eyes
Prominent facial bones, like a skull
Sallow skin
Thinning hair
Crying
Teeth loosening in the gums
Health problems from lack of essential nutrients
Shiny, glittery eyes
Oversleeping
Exhaustion
Weak movements
Body tremors
Loss of consciousness
Sagging skin
An unhealthy complexion (greasy skin, discoloration, acne)
Protruding cheekbones
Unfocused thoughts
A whispery voice
A willingness to eat anything, even food that is rotten or unsafe
An uneven or racing heartbeat
Death

**Cues of Suppressed Hunger:**
Drinking lots of water in an attempt to fill the void
Eyes that keep watching visible food
A clear refusal to look at food
Chronic gum-chewing, smoking, or other oral fixations

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*Writer’s Tip:* As hunger intensifies, both common sense and determination erode. Characters will do things they normally wouldn’t do if it means alleviating their hunger.
ILLNESS

DEFINITION: an unhealthy condition of the body
*Note: Though illnesses can focus on either the body or the mind, this entry has been limited to illnesses within the physical body.

Physical Signals:
Feverish, glassy eyes
Eyes that are dull and blank
Skin shining with sweat
Coughs and sneezes
A runny nose
Chattering teeth
Quivering muscles
Vomiting
Fainting
Dehydration
A pale complexion
Prolonged sleep periods
Bad breath
Restless sleep
Labored breathing
Loss of stamina
Skin that is dry and papery, hot and flushed, or cold and clammy
A raspy or nasal voice
Seeking a doctor’s advice
Taking medications
Working hard all day and crashing at the first sign of rest
Complaining
Steps that drag
Drooping shoulders
Dark smudges under the eyes

Internal Sensations:
Sensitive skin
Feeling feverish
Body aches
Nausea
Muscle weakness and joint aches
A sensation of being cold or hot
The sense of taste being “off”
Loss of appetite
Aches in localized places (head, stomach, ear, throat)

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Dry mouth
Fatigue, lethargy
Thirst
Rapid or sluggish blood pressure and pulse

**Mental Responses:**
Impatience
Feeling “foggy”
Losing a sense of time
Attempting to distract oneself from the discomfort
Trying not to think of all the things that aren’t getting done
Worry over others getting sick
Fearing that one’s simple cold will turn to something worse
Frustration at a lingering illness

**Cues of Acute or Long-Term Illness:**
Anger
Depression
Weight loss
Hair loss
Sunken eyes, sallow skin
An odor of sickness
Refusing to eat
An overall demeanor of frailness
A weakened physique
A determination to overcome
Gratitude; an appreciation for the good things in one’s life
Finding comfort in religion
A desire for the discomfort to end
A willingness to try risky or unproven remedies

**Cues of Suppressed Illness:**
Denying to oneself and others that anything is wrong
Declaring that it’s “just a cold”
A determination to push through and keep working despite symptoms
Dependence on medications and sleep aids

**Writer’s Tip:** When rounding out a character, don’t forget about her physical side. Is she strong or prone to illness? What kind of illness, and what brings it on? Knowing these weaknesses enables you to lay a foundation for things to go from bad to worse at critical times.

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INEBRIATION

DEFINITION: a state of exhilaration or stupefaction, usually caused by alcohol; intoxication

Physical Signals:
A weaving walk
A slurred voice
Giggling, excessive laughter
Waving the arms in slow motion
Fumbling, clumsiness
Poor hand-eye coordination
Poor depth perception (stumbling over obstacles, missing a chair when sitting)
Excessive dancing, celebrating
Hooting, yelling, shouting, and swearing
Speaking unfiltered thoughts
Overreacting, misjudging the emotions of others
Falling into people, crashing into objects
Holding onto the wall when walking
Shuffling steps
A lurching walk or run
Hunching over
Leaning too closely to people
Increased touches through movement and gesturing
A relaxed posture
Spilling food or drinks
Slowly tilting the head
Sloppy eating
Closing one’s eyes
Shifting the body back and forth to find balance
Leaning, standing, or sitting at an angle
Sweating
Talking too loudly
Eyes glowing, glittering
Slowed reflexes
Blinking rapidly to focus on something
Bad breath, beer breath
Easy camaraderie (hugging, touching) even with strangers
Talking too much, interrupting
Pulling pranks or committing petty crimes for fun

Internal Sensations:
Tunnel vision

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Nausea
Feeling like the room is spinning
A tingling or fuzzy feeling in the body

**Mental Responses:**
A desire to socialize, talk with, and interact with others
A decreased sense of personal space
Taking risks
Poor judgment
A sense of courage, feeling the need to act
Losing track of time
Increased aggression
Missing or misinterpreting negative body language cues
Slowed reactions and responses
A loss of inhibitions
Increased sense of kinship and affection: *I love you, man!*
Immunity to embarrassment
Believing that one is more suave, charming, and intelligent than one really is
Assuming everyone else is just as inebriated

**Cues of Long-Term Inebriation:**
Collapsing
Yawning, falling asleep, passing out
Vomiting
Blackouts
Alcohol poisoning
Loss of bladder control

**Cues of Suppressed Inebriation:**
Insisting that one is sober or fine
Attempting to prove sobriety (walking a line, touching the nose)
Forcing eyes as wide as they’ll go
Deflecting: *He’s way more drunk than me*

**Writer’s Tip:** Depending on how quickly the liver metabolizes alcohol, inebriation symptoms will vary from person to person. Weight, body chemistry, and genetics are also factors in how well the body tolerates liquor. Because alcohol has an affinity for water, people with more fat tissue often take longer to reach peak BAC (Blood Alcohol Content).
LETHARGY

DEFINITION: the quality or state of being drowsy, listless, or apathetic

Physical Signals:
Slouched body posture
Steps that drag
Ponderous movements
Half-closed eyes
Slow, deep breaths
An unfocused gaze
Lying prone or folding oneself into a recliner
The body conforming to whatever surface it rests on
Staring at nothing
The head resting heavily in the hand
The upper body resting on a table, head on folded arms
Limp limbs, still hands and feet
Lifeless eyes
Signs of letting oneself go (unwashed hair, wrinkled clothes)
Using the least physical exertion to complete a task (taking the elevator instead of stairs)
Drinking caffeinated beverages or energy drinks
Seeking a doctor’s advice
Dropping out of active hobbies
Sitting or lying for long periods without moving
Yawns and languorous stretches
Moving only to shift body position
Doing without instead of getting up to get a drink or snack
Asking others to do things that require movement
Canceling appointments
Turning down social opportunities
Withdrawal from others
Choosing activities with no physical or mental stimulation
Not engaging in conversation, answering with a mumble or shrug
Asking others to bring things rather than get up and get them
A lack of pickiness, indiscriminate
Choosing what’s easy over all else
Avoiding people, displaying hermit-like tendencies

Internal Sensations:
A heaviness in the limbs
A sensation of not wanting to move
Loss of appetite

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Mental Responses:
Lack of motivation
Mentally talking oneself into a better mood
Seeking out possible causes
Worry over a possible physical cause for the lethargy (sickness or disease)
Loss of interest in things that used to excite
Thick thoughts, fuzziness
A desire to do nothing, to not think
Denial that there is a problem
Not noticing what’s going on with other people
An inability to help others with their problems
Difficulty making decisions

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Lethargy:
Depression
Symptoms of an underlying illness that may be causing the lethargy
Isolation
Dependence on stimulants
Muscle atrophy
Illness
Weight gain or loss
Sleep that doesn’t restore one’s energy

Cues of Suppressed Lethargy:
Blaming one’s behavior on boredom or being overworked
Claiming that all one needs is a good night’s sleep
Putting on a happy face around others, then crashing when alone
Claiming to have participated in physical activities that no one has witnessed
Waving off others’ concerns
Refusing to see a doctor out of fear of the results

Writer’s Tip: Lethargy is largely a physical ailment, but it has a profound effect on a person’s psyche, compounding the physical problem with self-doubt, anxiety, and even depression. When dealing with an ailment like lethargy, always remember to address the emotional and mental effects, too.
PAIN

DEFINITION: physical discomfort associated with an injury or illness

Physical Signals:
Clenching or grinding the teeth
Probing or grabbing at the pained area and wincing
Hobbling about, taking tentative steps
Watering eyes, crying
Flinching when touched
Leaning back and grimacing
Expelling a grunt or pained hiss at exertion
Asking for aid (to move, to get something, to call for help)
Medicating
Breaths that saw in and out
Flaring nostrils
Trying to sleep it off
Gripping people or nearby objects for support
Rubbing or obsessively checking the offending spot
A bent back, hunched shoulders
A stiff walk
Trembling limbs
Blotchy skin
Glassy eyes
Screaming, moaning, or groaning
Biting the lip
Rocking back and forth
Panting
Repeating the same phrase over and over
Distracting gestures (flapping a hand, tapping a foot, nodding the head)
Squeezing the eyes shut, refusing to look
Squirming in discomfort
Arching the back

Internal Sensations:
Shuddering breaths
Hyperventilation
Nausea
Light-headedness at the sight of blood
Starbursts behind the eyelids
Tight muscles
Dizziness
Painting or blacking out

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Cramping
Feeling cold or feverish
A dry or coppery taste in the mouth
Shock

**Mental Responses:**
Panic
Attempting to calm oneself
Hallucinations
Short-temperedness
Trying to convince oneself that it isn’t as bad as it seems
Bargaining with God

**Cues of Acute or Long-Term Pain:**
Begging for the pain to end
Making final preparations
Depression
Lines forming around the eyes and mouth
A haggard face
Drooping eyelids and mouth
Dark hollows under the eyes
A pale complexion
Excessive sleep
Passing out
Medication dependency or addiction
Asking for death

**Cues of Suppressed Pain:**
Clenching the jaw
Whitened lips
Tension throughout one’s body
Lying down
Remaining perfectly still
Avoiding talking to others
Sweat gleaming on the face
Hands clenching, nails biting into the skin
Hands bunching up a blanket or clutching at one’s clothing

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**Writer’s Tip:** Each person has a different pain tolerance. Your character’s personality and (in)ability to withstand pain will determine whether they would show open symptoms of pain or suppress them.

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RELAXATION

DEFINITION: being at ease; unstressed

Physical Signals:
An easy smile
Half-lidded eyes
Leaning back in a chair
Reclining on a couch or floor
Leaning against a doorjamb or wall
Placing the hands behind the head
An open stance
A carefree walk
Slouching
Putting one’s hands in one’s pockets
Yawning
Hands that hang loosely at the sides
Feet angling out
Flaccid muscles
Fingers laced across the belly (if lying down)
Hands laying in the lap
Legs crossed, one foot languidly bouncing
Stretching, rolling the neck
Sprawling on a couch, chair, or bed
Participating in relaxing activities
Listening to soothing music, eyes closed, head nodding
Easy touches (patting someone’s hand, rubbing their back, giving a light hug)
Unhurried speech
Driving under the speed limit
Being unconcerned with external events
Becoming somewhat unobservant
Acting as if one has all the time in the world
Falling asleep while watching TV or laying out by the pool
Sleeping deeply and waking up refreshed

Internal Sensations:
Loose muscles
Steady, even breathing
An overall feeling of health and well-being
An improved immune system

Mental Responses:
A deliberate attempt to not be disturbed by external events

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Indulging in daydreams
Wanting the feeling to go on and on
A lack of urgency
Clear-headedness
A sense of balance
Agreeability

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Relaxation:
Laziness
A refusal to participate in anything strenuous or potentially stressful
Selfishness
Foggy thinking
Excessive sleeping
Restlessness
A desire to get back to something stimulating or challenging

Writer’s Tip: In life, relaxation is good, but in a story, it signals a lack of conflict. If your character is relaxed, make sure a catalyst is introduced to ensure he doesn’t stay that way for too long.
STRESS

DEFINITION: a state of strain or tension

Physical Signals:
Rigid muscles
A clenched jaw
Tendons standing out
Pacing
A quick, hurried walk
Accelerated speech
Barking orders at people
Eyes that dart from one thing to another
Becoming quick-tempered
A strong, businesslike handshake
Constant motion
Speaking in a rushed tone
Yelling
Rolling the neck and shoulders
Shaking out the hands and arms
Rubbing the neck
Running hands through the hair
Arriving late to meetings and appointments
Squinting
Criticizing
Leaning forward, the neck stiff
Approaching mundane tasks mechanically and efficiently
Driving offensively or thoughtlessly
Listening to loud, angry music
Complaining
 Grinding the teeth
Gum-chewing, knuckle-popping, and other stress relief gestures
Bursting into tears
Aggression
Skipping meals

Internal Sensations:
Neck and back pain
Muscle strain or spasms
Headache
Loss of appetite
Knots in the stomach
Heartburn

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Mental Responses:
Difficulty sleeping
Irritability
An inability to see value or enjoyment in the little things
Impatience
Awaking from sleep yet feeling unrest
Frustration with other people
Becoming argumentative
An inability to turn the mind off
A lack of concentration
Worrying
Defensiveness

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Stress:
Weight loss
Heightened anxiety
Insomnia
Drinking to fall asleep
Reliance on sleep meds
Exhaustion
Digestive disorders
Hypertension
Increased sickness
Strained relationships
Ulcers
Worry that borders on paranoia

Cues of Suppressed Stress:
Closing the eyes and taking deep breaths in an attempt to relax
Increased physical exercise as a form of release
Increased negativity
Making excuses for one’s behavior
Over committing in an effort to look like everything is in control
Denial
Forcing a smile
Apologizing for one’s tone or actions

Writer’s Tip: Body tension should always have a root emotional cause. Make sure the emotional component is attached to the bodily stress so there is no doubt in the reader’s mind that something is driving this behavior, rather than it being a normal characteristic.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

We hope you have found Emotion Amplifiers to be helpful. For comments, questions, or just to stop in and chat, please visit Angela and Becca at The Bookshelf Muse blog, which can be found at our Writers Helping Writers website. You can also contact us via email at Jaddpublishing@gmail.com.

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