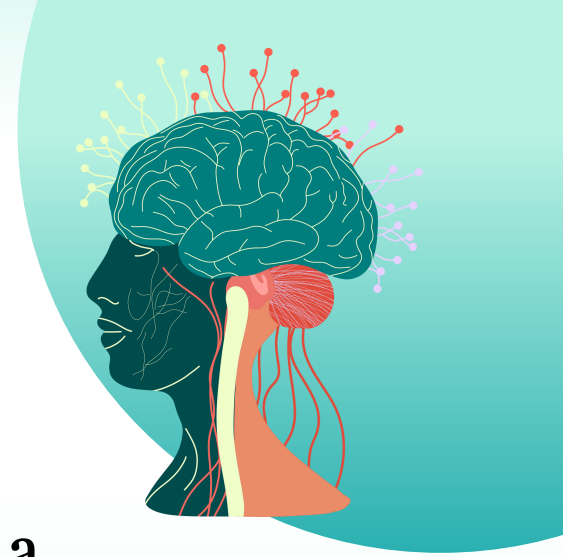


resetting your nervous system



A regulated nervous system is a prerequisite for high-level brain functioning.

Our body and brain coordinate functioning and maintain health through the autonomic nervous system which controls involuntary processes (like breathing, digesting food, and pumping blood). Balance is maintained by cycling back and forth between two nervous systems - the *sympathetic system (SNS)* activates our body processes in times of stress/danger and the *parasympathetic system (PNS)* disactivates these processes to return our body/brain to a calm baseline.

THE IMPACT OF DYSREGULATION

Have you experienced feeling as if your brain has shut down while staring at a blank page?

Or nervously revised for an exam and realised you just read the same passage multiple times without taking anything in?

Or snapped and said something you regret?

When our brain senses a signal of stress or danger, the amygdala (like your brain's security alarm) triggers the sympathetic nervous system to start the fight-flight-freeze response. This prepares you to respond to a threat by pumping blood to your muscles, increasing oxygen intake, and heightening your senses.

To save energy for survival actions, the parts of your brain used for complex thought which we use for studying, communicating, etc. gets switched off. Making it feel like you can't think.

Dysregulation happens when your sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are unbalanced - if fight-flight-freeze is activated too often or isn't counterbalanced by returning to calm.

While your nervous system self-regulates involuntarily, **you can encourage your nervous system to reset** by triggering activation of the parasympathetic system. This is called **regulation**.

REGULATION STRATEGIES

◆ **Deep breathing & long exhales** - exhaling activates your parasympathetic system (PNS) so extending it helps your system reset to calm.

◆ You can do whatever ratio feels comfortable, try breathing in for a count of 4 and out for a count of 6 to start. Try and breathe from your stomach so you feel it move in and out.

◆ **Cyclic sighing** - this strategy is a powerful double whammy. It immediately activates your PNS with long exhales and by reinflating the air sacs in your lungs, which deflate throughout the day

◆ Inhale deeply, filling up your lungs all the way, and then take a second sip of air in. Follow it up with a slow exhale. Try a couple of rounds.

◆ **Look around & notice** - using the muscles in your eye for a wide lens activates your PNS. Paying attention to details in your environment can also help your brain calm down and refocus.

◆ Try looking at a point in front of you and focus what you can see on the edges of your vision without moving your eyes. Or look around and notice what colours, shapes, or details you can see.

Each of these techniques can be used in the moment. Practicing them consistently, for even 5 minutes a day, can also improve your nervous system regulation over time.