

A quick guide to **NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION**

Understanding Your Nervous System

Your autonomic nervous system (ANS) regulates your body's stress and relaxation responses.

It has three main states:

Regulated (Parasympathetic/Rest & Digest)

Feeling calm, present, and connected. Your body is in balance, allowing for digestion, immune function, and emotional regulation.

Hyperaroused (Sympathetic/Fight or Flight)

Feeling anxious, restless, or on edge. This state prepares your body to react to threats, leading to increased heart rate and heightened alertness.

Hypoaroused (Dorsal Vagal/Freeze or Shutdown)

Feeling numb, disconnected, or exhausted. This is the body's response to overwhelming stress, leading to dissociation, withdrawal, or shutdown.

Tip: Recognizing which state you're in can help you choose the best regulation technique.

Signs of Each State

Hyperaroused (Fight or Flight State)

Signs: Rapid breathing or breath-holding, increased heart rate, muscle tension, racing thoughts, restlessness, anxiety, impulsivity, hypervigilance, feeling easily startled, difficulty concentrating.

Causes: Perceived or actual threats, unresolved trauma, high stress, sensory overload, conflict or confrontation, excessive workload, lack of control over situations, caffeine or stimulant intake.

Regulated (Balanced State)

Signs: Calm, steady breathing, feeling safe and socially connected, able to focus and think clearly, emotional balance, physical relaxation, open to learning, healthy digestion, and normal heart rate.

Causes: Supportive relationships, predictable routines, regular self-care, restful sleep, proper nutrition, feeling heard and understood, engaging in enjoyable activities.

Hypoaroused (Freeze or Shutdown State)

Signs: Shallow breathing, low energy, fatigue, numbness, slowed heart rate, difficulty speaking or thinking, dissociation, zoning out, hopelessness, lack of motivation, emotional detachment.

Causes: Chronic stress or trauma, feelings of helplessness, prolonged isolation, burnout, excessive criticism or neglect, emotional overwhelm, sensory deprivation, physical exhaustion.

Self-Regulation Techniques

For Hyperarousal (Calming Down)

-  **4-7-8 Breathing:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7, exhale for 8. Repeat 4 times.
-  **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Tense and release muscles from head to toe.
-  **Soothing Touch:** Place a hand over your heart, gently rub your arms, or hold a weighted object.
-  **Safe Place Visualization:** Imagine yourself in a calm, peaceful setting, engaging your senses.
-  **Humming or Singing:** Activates the vagus nerve, promoting relaxation.
-  **Longer Exhales:** Exhaling longer than inhaling helps engage the parasympathetic nervous system.  **Orienting Exercise:** Slowly scan the room, name objects, and describe your environment to re-ground yourself.

 *Tip: Recognizing which state you're in can help you choose the best regulation technique.*



Self-Regulation Techniques

For Hypoarousal (Reactivating Energy)

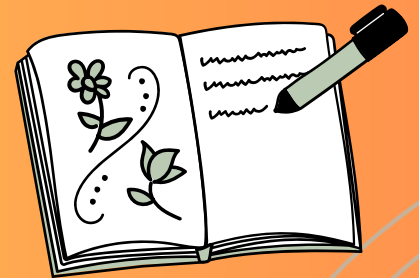
-  **Cold Water Splash:** Rinse your face with cold water or hold an ice cube.
-  **Fast, Rhythmic Movement:** Jumping jacks, dancing, or brisk walking to increase alertness.
-  **Engage Your Senses:** Listen to upbeat music, smell a strong scent (peppermint, citrus), or chew gum.
-  **Sunlight Exposure:** Step outside, feel the warmth or coolness of the air, and notice your surroundings.
-  **Gentle Stretching or Tapping:** Lightly tap different areas of your body to wake up sensation.
-  **Vocalization:** Speaking aloud, humming, or singing can activate the vagus nerve.
-  **Shaking Exercise:** Stand up and shake your arms and legs for 30 seconds to release built-up energy.



Self-Regulation Techniques

Daily Regulation Practices

-  **Mindful Breathing:** Take 1-2 minutes of slow, deep breaths throughout the day.
-  **Grounding Exercises:** Use your five senses to stay present.
-  **Movement:** Regular exercise, yoga, or stretching to keep energy flowing.
-  **Connection:** Spend time with safe, supportive people who help co-regulate your nervous system.
-  **Journaling:** Reflect on your emotional state and what techniques work best for you.
-  **Hydration & Nutrition:** A well-nourished body supports nervous system function.
-  **Sleep Hygiene:** Prioritize restful sleep, as it plays a crucial role in nervous system health.



Self-Regulation Techniques

Emergency Reset Techniques

👐 **Hands in Warm Water:** Run warm water over your hands to bring comfort and presence.

👁️ **5-4-3-2-1 Method:** Name 5 things you see, 4 things you touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste.

👐 **Butterfly Hug:** Cross your arms over your chest and tap gently, alternating sides.

👐 **Breath + Movement:** Inhale while raising your arms, exhale while lowering them.

🎵 **Vocal Toning:** Deep humming or chanting activates the vagus nerve.

🛏️ **Weighted Object:** Holding a weighted blanket or pillow can bring a sense of grounding.

🌈 **Color & Texture Awareness:** Notice different colors or textures to shift focus from distress.



Long-Term Nervous System Resilience

🧑 Therapeutic Support: Work with a therapist to explore deeper patterns of nervous system dysregulation.

🧘 Mindfulness & Meditation: Regular meditation strengthens the brain's ability to regulate emotions.

🎨 Creative Expression: Art, music, journaling, or movement can provide an outlet for emotions.

🌿 Nature Connection: Spending time in natural environments helps regulate the nervous system.

🤝 Building Safe Relationships: Emotional safety in relationships helps co-regulate and stabilize the nervous system.

📖 Polyvagal Theory Awareness: Understanding how social engagement impacts regulation can provide insight into emotional states.

Final Note 💙

Your nervous system is always working to protect you. If you notice yourself feeling dysregulated, try not to judge it—it's just your body's way of responding to the world. With time, patience, and practice, you can develop greater resilience and the ability to bring yourself back into balance.

Beyond Your Mask

