

Fact Sheet: The Nervous System & You — Basics & Regulation

Your nervous system plays a vital role in how you think, feel, and respond to the world around you. Understanding its basic functions can help you learn how to regulate stress, emotions, and overall wellbeing.

Nervous System Basics

- The nervous system is your body's communication network, made up of the brain, spinal cord, and nerves.
- It controls automatic responses (like heart rate and digestion) and conscious actions (like movement and thinking).
- The autonomic nervous system (ANS) regulates functions without you needing to think about them.

Two Key Branches of the ANS

1. Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS):
 - Activates the 'fight or flight' response.
 - Gets your body ready to respond to danger or stress.
 - Increases heart rate, breathing, and energy.
2. Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS):
 - Activates the 'rest and digest' state.
 - Helps your body calm down and recover.
 - Slows heart rate and supports digestion and healing.

Signs Your Nervous System May Be Dysregulated

- Feeling constantly anxious, overwhelmed, or shut down.
- Difficulty sleeping, concentrating, or relaxing.
- Physical symptoms like headaches, fatigue, or stomach issues.

Simple Nervous System Regulation Tools

- Deep, slow breathing (e.g., inhale for 4, exhale for 6).
- Grounding exercises (focus on your senses or surroundings).
- Gentle movement (stretching, walking, rocking).
- Soothing touch (placing a hand on your heart or hugging a pillow).
- Connection (talk to a supportive friend or pet an animal).

Takeaway

When you understand your nervous system, you gain tools to support your mental and emotional wellbeing. Learning to notice your state and respond with care is a powerful step toward self-regulation and healing.