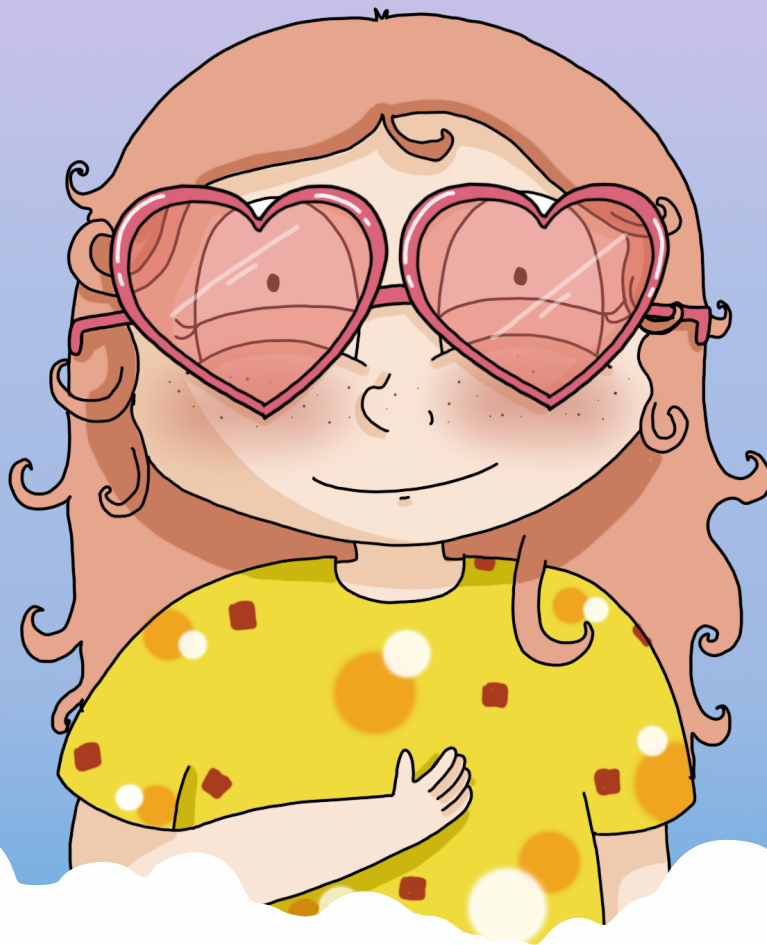


SOOTHE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM WITH YOUR SENSES



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome!



If you've ever caught yourself pausing to close your eyes and deeply inhale when you smell a beautiful flower or a fresh pot of coffee brewing then you'll know the power of your sense of smell.



If you've ever been mesmerised by watching a roaring fire, waves crashing in to shore or been soothed by the dim light of a salt lamp then you'll understand the power of your sense of sight.



If you've ever felt calmer after a massage, snuggling a hot water bottle or patting your furry friend then you'll know the power of your sense of touch.



If you've ever intuitively rocked yourself back and forward or taken yourself off to the gym or for a walk to cope with anxiety or stress, then you've experienced the power of movement.



If you've ever felt calmer when drinking a cup of tea or felt the satisfaction of munching on something crunchy then you'll know the power of your sense taste.



And if you've ever been moved by classical music, drifted off to the sound of the rain or felt your body relax listening to the sound of birdsong then you'll know the power of your sense of hearing.

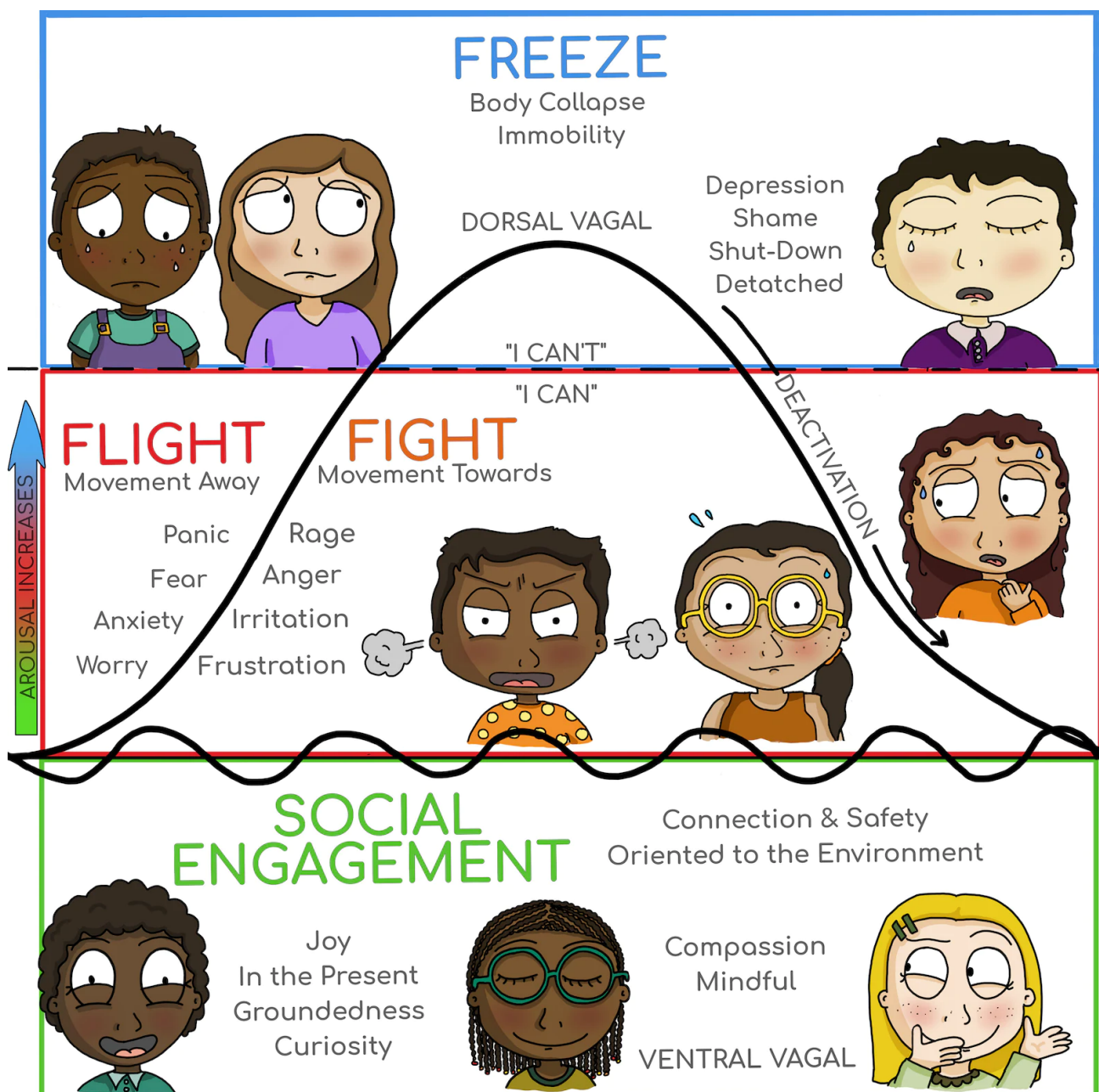
In this workbook you'll find some information about your nervous system and the different states it can be in as well as a huge check-list and self-reflection tool to discover the many ways you can recruit your senses to regulate your nervous system. You'll also get to discover which of *your* senses is most dominant for you!

There are a whopping 130 different sensory soothing ideas waiting for you ahead - enjoy!

THE STATES OF YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Before you can regulate your nervous system it helps to understand what 'state' it is in. Let's start by learning briefly about the states of the nervous system, then look at a tool to help you assess which state you might be in (remember this is quite a subjective assessment and isn't definitive - you can be in a mixed state, and your nervous system state can change throughout the day). Take a look at the Polyvagal Theory graph below and then at the five F's on the next page.

POLYVAGAL THEORY



THE FIVE F'S

When you are feeling a little stressed you are likely in your sympathetic nervous system - here you might be in either a **fight** or **flight** response. Feeling angry, irritated and defensive or feeling anxious, panicky and on-edge.

When you are feeling down or low in energy you might be in more of a dorsal vagal state - where you may feel depressed, flat, unmotivated or stuck. This is the **freeze** response.

When you are people pleasing, stuck in 'please and appease' mode you might be in a mixed nervous system state called the **Fawn** response.

When things are going smoothly and you are feeling calm, **free**, resilient & socially connected you are in a ventral vagal state.



"THE BEAR" - FIGHT

Sympathetic Nervous System
Anger + Aggression



"THE RABBIT" - FLIGHT

Sympathetic Nervous System
Flee + Avoid



"THE POSSUM" - FREEZE

Dorsal Vagal | Parasympathetic Nervous System
Shut down + Immobilise



"THE DEER" - FAWN

Mixed Nervous System Responses
Please + Appear



"THE JELLY FISH" - FREE

Ventral Vagal - Parasympathetic Nervous System
Rest + Digest + Restore + Calm +
Resilient + Socially Connected

SELF-CHECK

The scale below is a subjective assessment that allows you to rate how you are feeling to determine which nervous system state you might be in.

This helps you to be better informed as to what it is you might need in order to shift you out of a place of stress or threat and into a place of calm — Do you need to bring some energy in and up-regulate your system or do you need to find some calm amongst the chaos and down-regulate your system? Let's find out...

Look at the scale below from 0-10 and rate:

A) How do you feel in your body right now? Where would you place your level of energy along the scale?

B) How do you feel in your mind? What level of activity do your thoughts have along this scale?

0

5

10



BODY:

Tired, numb,
wanting to lie down,
slumping

MIND:

Slow, spacey, not
present/dissociated

Dorsal Vagal

FEELS LIKE:

Stuck, unmotivated, down,
flat, shame

NEEDS:

Up-regulation



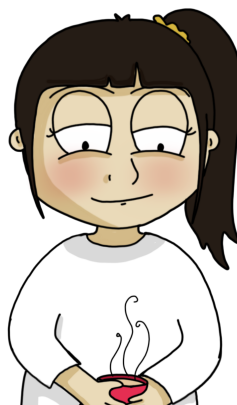
BODY | MIND:

Just right
Calm
Present

**Ventral Vagal
(Parasympathetic
Nervous System)**

FEELS LIKE:

Calm, socially connected,
relaxed, resilient, creative,
present



BODY:

Tense, panicky, fidgeting,
can't sit still, jittery

MIND:

Racing, incoherent,
ruminating, panicky,
illogical

**Sympathetic
Nervous System**

FEELS LIKE:

Anxiety, stress, panic,
anger, irritability,
defensive, overworking

NEEDS:

Down-regulation



SOOTHING & REGULATING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM WITH YOUR SENSES

You can help regulate your nervous system out of a threat response state and back into a place of calm (ventral vagal activation). Your body is good at returning to a baseline level of regulation on its own, but we can assist it to do this and sometimes it needs extra support if it has gotten stuck in a pattern of being dysregulated - i.e. anxious or stressed often.

There are many ways that are effective at helping you relax and find a sense of calm. In this resource we are looking at ways you can do that using your **senses** — Some of the more direct and most effective ways to activate your vagus nerve and return you to your parasympathetic nervous system are listed below with a star beside them ★

Below you will find an extensive list of ideas to soothe & regulate your nervous system. Most of the ideas are calming — some are stimulating, or can be done in a way that brings more energy in. As you go through the list below you might like to mark a little arrow pointing either up or down beside the items that speak to you to indicate whether you would use this tool to up-regulate you or to down-regulate you.

What does that mean?

Tools that up-regulate — These bring energy in to your nervous system. They might make you feel more awake or more 'activated'. If you find yourself in more of a dorsal vagal response then tools that up-regulate you will be useful. So if you notice yourself feeling slumped, tired, unmotivated, stuck, down or flat then these are for you.

Tools that down-regulate — These help to calm high energy and return you to a place of feeling more at peace and calm. If you find yourself in more of a sympathetic nervous system response then tools that down-regulate you will be useful. (A note; you may want to 'discharge' the sympathetic energy first to 'complete the stress cycle'. You can do this by shaking, jumping, pushing a wall, stomping etc first and then trying a more soothing, slow practice). Down-regulation will help soothe and calm you when you're feeling anxious, stressed, overwhelmed, on edge, panicky or angry.

When it comes to regulating your nervous system and feeling safe - 80% of the communication moves from your *body* up to your mind. Your brain is taking cues from your physical experience and what's going on inside your body to help it decide if you are safe or under threat. Therefore, there is only so much we can do with our thoughts. You can't entirely think your way to feeling safe. You need to use your body to influence feelings of anxiety, stress, stuck-ness etc to help you switch and regulate the state of your nervous system.

Your senses are a powerful way to use your body and somatic experience to communicate a sense of safety and to help you get calm and grounded.

YOUR DOMINANT SENSE

Time to discover which of your senses is most dominant / your preferred sense.
There is no right or wrong here, and this may change over time too.

The lists below will help you discover some new sensory ideas to regulate your nervous system and also to find out which of your senses might work the best for you in order to do this.

How to:

Below you will see 6 coloured boxes containing a list of sensory soothing ideas.
They are grouped into sensory categories:

- Sight
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste
- Sound
- Movement

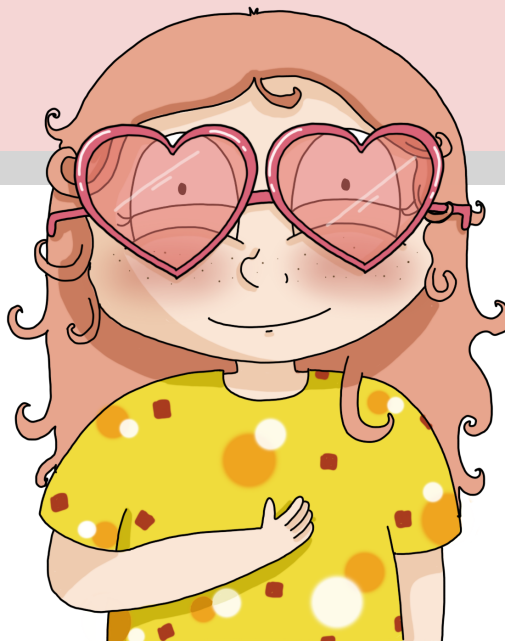
Read through the lists below and put a check next to the ones that either:

- You already do and find effective in helping you regulate your nervous system (this might mean calming you or energising you)
- You think that you might like to try

You could also put an arrow, ↑ or ↓, indicating if this tool helps to bring energy in (up-regulate) or calm you down (down-regulate) or maybe it can be both depending on how you use it

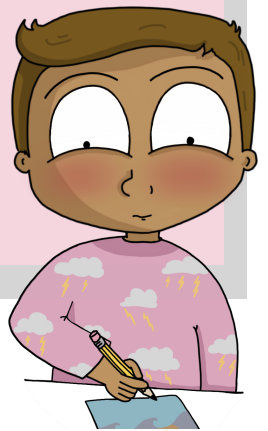
At the end you can go back through and count how many ticks you have for each sense. This will help you see which of your senses is more dominant/preferred and therefore may be more effective in helping to regulate you and your nervous system.

(i.e. the sense with the most ticks is your more dominant sense, and probably most effective sense in helping regulate you).



SIGHT

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Looking at a sunset or sunrise | ☐ Reading |
| ☐ Watching TV/movies | ☐ Doing a puzzle |
| ☐ Looking at the ocean | ☐ Wearing sunglasses |
| ☐ Looking at plants & nature | ☐ Painting |
| ☐ Colourful lights | ☐ Closing your eyes |
| ☐ Bright lights | ☐ Look at photos |
| ☐ Dim lighting | ☐ Doodling |
| ☐ Looking at artwork | ☐ Snow globes / glitter jars |
| ☐ Drawing | ☐ Lava lamp/ salt lamp |
| ☐ Kaleidoscope | ☐ Sudoku |
| ☐ Watching a fire/flickering flames | ☐ Watching a candle burning |



SMELL

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Uplifting essential oils (like peppermint) | ☐ Pets fur |
| ☐ Soothing essential oils (like lavender) | ☐ Body wash in the shower |
| ☐ Cut grass | ☐ Using scented pens |
| ☐ Perfume | ☐ Scented candles |
| ☐ Fresh brewed coffee | ☐ Body lotion |
| ☐ Fresh laundry / washing | ☐ Flowers |
| ☐ Herbal tea | ☐ Shampoo'd hair |
| ☐ Food cooking | |
| ☐ Smell of nature | |



TOUCH

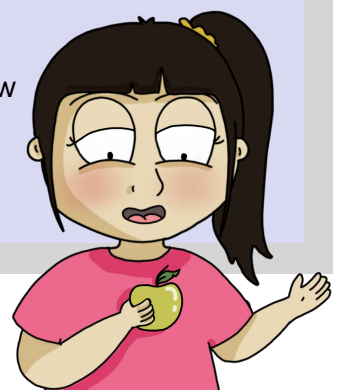
- ☐ Fluffy clothes
- ☐ Snuggly blankets
- ☐ Soft sheets / fluffy sheets / fresh sheets
- ☐ Smooth textures
- ☐ Rough or bumpy textures
- ☐ Silk
- ☐ Burrito wrap
- ☐ Warm bath / spa
- ☐ Cold water (shower or face dunk) ★
- ☐ Hot water bottle / wheat bag
- ☐ Hand on heart
- ☐ Push against a wall
- ☐ Sitting in a beanbag
- ☐ Eye mask
- ☐ Deep pressure squeezes
- ☐ Weighted blanket
- ☐ Tapping down arms or on thighs
- ☐ Butterfly taps
- ☐ Ice on neck/face ★

- ☐ Fidget toys
- ☐ Hug/self-hug
- ☐ Cuddling a toy
- ☐ Petting an animal
- ☐ Get a massage
- ☐ Self-Massage with moisturiser / body oil
- ☐ Foam roller
- ☐ Brush / play with your hair
- ☐ Modelling with clay
- ☐ Stress balls
- ☐ Loose clothes
- ☐ Tight or compression clothes
- ☐ Shower
- ☐ Light touch / strokes (Brushing arms / chest/ face)
- ☐ Wheat bags on palms of hands
- ☐ PMR/IMR
- ☐ Vagal massage (ears, neck etc) ★
- ☐ Warm or cold cloth on eyes/face



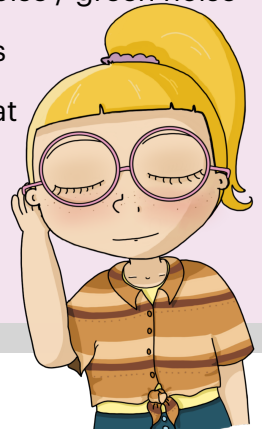
TASTE

- ☐ Chewy food
- ☐ Sour food
- ☐ Sweet food
- ☐ Savoury food
- ☐ Crunchy texture
- ☐ Smooth texture
- ☐ Eating peppermints
- ☐ Spicy food
- ☐ Chewing/sucking ice
- ☐ Fresh flavours
- ☐ Drinking tea or coffee
- ☐ Drinking through a straw
- ☐ Hard candy
- ☐ Chewing gum



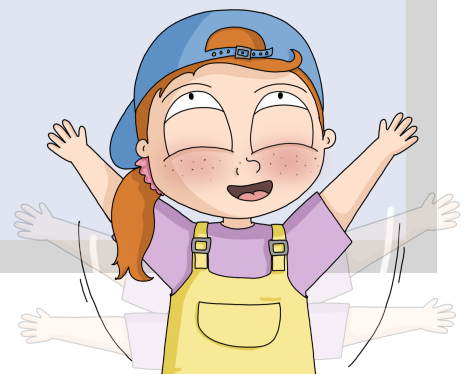
SOUND

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Calming music | ☐ Audiobooks |
| ☐ Upbeat music | ☐ Podcasts |
| ☐ Singing | ☐ Sound machine |
| ☐ Talking to someone | ☐ White noise / brown noise / green noise |
| ☐ Humming ★ | ☐ Sound of deep breaths |
| ☐ Music through headphones | ☐ Listening to a heartbeat |
| ☐ Noise cancelling headphone or ear muffs | ☐ Sounds of nature |
| ☐ Silence | ☐ Sounds of the ocean |
| ☐ Chanting (i.e. 'om' or 'voo') ★ | |



MOVEMENT

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Swinging on a swing | ☐ Throwing / kicking a ball |
| ☐ Swaying side to side | ☐ Deep breathing ★ |
| ☐ Running | ☐ Vibration |
| ☐ Walking | ☐ Rubbing feet back & forth on floor |
| ☐ Jumping | ☐ Balance board |
| ☐ Skipping | ☐ Rocking in a rocking chair |
| ☐ Yoga ★ | ☐ Climbing |
| ☐ Stretching | ☐ Spinning / twirling |
| ☐ Lifting weights | ☐ Crawling |
| ☐ Shaking | ☐ Punching bag |
| ☐ Swimming | ☐ Dance |
| ☐ Resistance bands | ☐ Gargling ★ |



MY SUMMARY

My most dominant/preferred sense is (most number of ticks/#1):

The order of my other senses according to preference/dominance (number of ticks):

#2:

#3:

#4:

#5:

#6:

Other ideas that work for me:

Sight

Smell

Touch

Taste

Sound

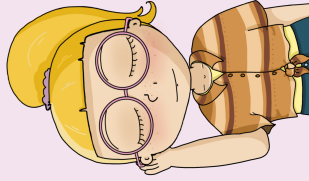
Movement



SENSORY SOOTHING

SOUND

- Calming music
- Upbeat music
- Singing
- Talking to someone
- Humming
- Music through headphones
- Noise cancelling headphones or ear muffs
- Silence
- Sounds of nature
- Sounds of the ocean
- Audiobooks
- Podcasts
- Sound machine
- White noise / brown noise / green noise
- Sound of deep breaths
- Listening to a heartbeat



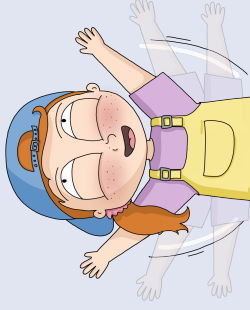
TASTE

- Chewy food
- Sour food
- Sweet food
- Savoury food
- Crunchy texture
- Smooth texture
- Eating peppermints
- Spicy food
- Chewing gum
- Fresh flavours
- Drinking tea or coffee
- Drinking through a straw
- Hard candy
- Chewing/sucking ice



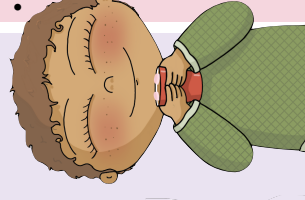
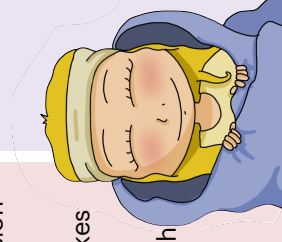
MOVEMENT

- Swinging on a swing
- Swaying side to side
- Running
- Walking
- Jumping
- Skipping
- Yoga
- Stretching
- Lifting weights
- Shaking
- Swimming
- Resistance bands
- Throwing / kicking a ball
- Deep breathing
- Vibration
- Balance board
- Rocking on a rocking chair
- Climbing
- Spinning / twirling
- Crawling
- Punching bag
- Dance
- Gargling



TOUCH

- Fluffy clothes
- Snuggly blankets
- Soft sheets
- Smooth textures
- Rough or bumpy textures
- Silk
- Burrito wrap
- Warm bath / spa
- Cold water (shower or face dunk)
- Hot water bottle / wheat bag
- Hand on heart
- Push against a wall
- Sitting in a beanbag
- Eye masks
- Deep pressure squeezes
- Weighted blanket
- Fidget toys
- Hugs
- Cuddling a toy
- Petting an animal
- Get a massage
- Massage in moisturiser / lotion
- Foam roller
- Brush / play with your hair
- Modelling with clay
- Stress balls
- Loose clothes
- Tight or compression clothes
- Shower
- Light touch / strokes
- Brushing arms / chest/ face
- Warm or cold cloth on eyes/face

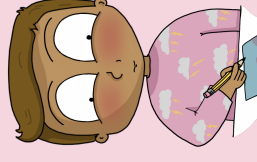


SMELL

- Uplifting essential oils (like peppermint)
- Soothing essential oils (like lavender)
- Cut grass
- Perfume
- Coffee brewing
- Fresh laundry / washing
- Herbal tea
- Food cooking
- Flowers
- Shampoo'd hair
- Pets fur
- Body wash in the shower
- Using scented pens
- Scented candles
- Body lotion

SIGHT

- Looking at a sunset or sunrise
- Watching TV/ movies
- Looking at the ocean
- Looking at plants & nature
- Colourful lights
- Bright lights
- Dim lighting
- Artwork
- Drawing
- Kaleidoscope
- Reading
- Doing a puzzle
- Wearing sunglasses
- Painting
- Close your eyes
- Look at photos
- Doodling
- Snow globes / glitter jars
- Lava lamp
- Sudoku



ACTIVATING THE VENTRAL VAGAL STATE & TONING YOUR VAGUS NERVE

As you read about earlier, when you are in your ventral vagal state you are able to feel calm, socially connected, and more resilient.

It's normal to move between nervous system states throughout the day, or to be in mixed states. Often we need a bit of sympathetic input to give us some mobilisation and energy and to get things done. And a bit of dorsal vagal (immobilisation) combined with ventral vagal (safety) allows us to be intimate with loved ones or to relax for bed at night.

Sometimes however, we can spend too much time in a state of stress, anxiety or shut down. Our nervous systems may reflexively (unconsciously) begin to respond to our environments and stressors by reverting to threat responses. When you have been through trauma, chronic stress or prolonged sympathetic/dorsal vagal activation your nervous system can rewire to respond from these places more and more often. This can change your 'baseline', making your nervous system more likely to respond from a dysregulated state. Your nervous system decides that whatever threat it has been through in the past, and whatever mechanisms it needed to adopt to keep you safe are likely going to be what is needed in the present and for your future too.

Your vagus nerve is your 10th cranial nerve, and is the main component of your parasympathetic nervous system - It wanders throughout many areas of your body, innervating a number of your internal organs and structures, such as your ear, your throat, lungs, heart, diaphragm and digestive system. It helps your body switch between your sympathetic nervous system and your parasympathetic nervous system, moving you back and forth between fight/flight mode and a parasympathetic state where you are more open, present and relaxed. When your vagus nerve is activated it helps to slow your heart rate, your breathing and it controls other unconscious body functions like digestion and your immune system. It acts like a brake, slowing down or turning off your sympathetic nervous system, stress response and mobilisation system.

When your vagus nerve lacks tone or doesn't function it means you'll find it harder to bounce back from times of stress. This can happen due to chronic stress/anxiety or trauma for example. You might also notice other symptoms of dysfunction like long-term fatigue, inflammation, headaches and digestive issues for example.

Activating your vagus nerve is a body-up approach to help you feel calm and regulated.

The more you use tools that help activate your vagus nerve the more you will tone it and increase your capacity for calm and resilience. When you find a tool that works for you/that you like - repeat it daily.

★ **Here are 11 ways to activate your vagus nerve** ★

1. Diaphragmatic/belly breathing
2. Humming and singing
3. Gargling
4. Cold exposure (like cold water blasts at the end of your shower or dunking your face in cold water)
5. Yoga
6. Massage (certain spots like in your ear or down your neck - google it!)
7. Chanting 'om' or 'voo'
8. Laughing (watch a funny laugh-out-loud movie or chat with a friend who you laugh with)
9. Meditation
10. Massage (there is a spot in your ear or gently down the sides of your neck - google it)
11. Eye movement - lie on your back with your hands behind your head. Keeping your face straight ahead looking at the roof move just your eyes to the left. Look left for 30 seconds or until you sigh, swallow or yawn then look right for 30 seconds until you have that sign of parasympathetic activation (the sigh or swallow etc).

MORE RESOURCES

Courses

If you would like to take a deep dive into a course to help you regulate your nervous system & learn new coping tools - my top course recommendations are:

1. Soma & Soul (30 days of somatic practices)
2. Soothe & Regulate the Nervous System
3. 15 Day Rest Your Nervous System Challenge (free)
4. Grounding & Mindfulness Course
5. Thriving for Highly Sensitive People & Empaths

I have LOTS more courses on my site (and all are free inside the Journey to Wellness Membership) .

[Check out our courses here](#)

Resources

My website and Etsy store are packed full of digital resources. Here are just a few that are wonderful for nervous system work:

1. Nervous System States - Threat Responses Flash Cards
2. The Anxiety Toolbox (e-book)
3. [My books \(Note to Self, Note to Self Journal, Words of Comfort\)](#)
4. The Morning Anxiety Kit
5. Mindfulness Cards

[Explore resources here](#)

www.journeytowellness.online