



Nervous System Regulation Practices

1. Grounding Techniques

Grounding helps bring your awareness back into the present moment and reconnect you with your body, especially when feeling overwhelmed or anxious.

Practice:

Sit comfortably, place your feet on the floor, and take a deep breath. Notice the sensation of your feet on the ground. Press them gently into the floor and become aware of your body's weight. Feel the support beneath you. You can also place your hands on your thighs and slowly press them to create a sense of grounding through your entire body.

2. Box Breathing (Four-Square Breathing)

This simple breathing technique helps regulate the nervous system by balancing oxygen levels and calming the body and mind.

Practice:

Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, hold your breath for four counts, exhale through your mouth for four counts, and hold again for four counts. Repeat for several cycles, allowing your breath to slow and your body to relax.

3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation can reduce tension and help shift the nervous system from a heightened state into a calmer one.

Practice:

Start at your feet and slowly tense the muscles for 5-7 seconds, then release the tension. Move up to your calves, thighs, stomach, chest, arms, and finally your neck and face. Notice how your body feels as you release tension.

4. Vagus Nerve Stimulation

The vagus nerve plays a key role in regulating the parasympathetic nervous system (the "rest and digest" system). Stimulating it can support deep relaxation.

Practice:

Take slow, deep breaths, emphasizing a long exhale (e.g., inhale for 4 counts, exhale for 8 counts). Humming or chanting also gently stimulates the vagus nerve and can create a calming effect.

5. Orienting to Safety

This practice helps shift focus away from a stress response by orienting your mind and body to the present and perceiving safety in your surroundings.

Practice:

Slowly look around your environment and find three things that signal safety or calmness (e.g., a warm light, a comfortable chair, or a plant). Notice these things and remind yourself that, in this moment, you are safe.

6. Self-Holding or Self-Soothing

Physical touch can help calm the nervous system by activating the parasympathetic response.

Practice:

Wrap your arms around your body in a gentle hug, or place one hand on your heart and the other on your stomach. Breathe deeply and allow yourself to feel supported. Another option is gently stroking your arms or face with your hands to offer yourself a sense of soothing.

7. Bilateral Stimulation

This practice helps to engage both hemispheres of the brain, calming the nervous system and fostering a sense of balance.

Practice:

Cross your arms and tap each shoulder alternately with your opposite hand, or gently tap your thighs in an alternating rhythm. Do this for a few minutes while breathing slowly and deeply.