



Nervous System Regulation Movements

When we are chronically overwhelmed, stressed or triggered, our nervous system can become dysregulated. This can lead to reduced or scattered energy, getting stuck in our “stories” and an overall sense of dis-ease. The following embodiment exercises can be soothing by stimulating the parasympathetic (rest and digest) nervous system.

Take a Pause

Pausing, for even just a moment, prevents us from living solely on automatic pilot. Which daily activities would benefit from a one breath cycle (one inhale, one exhale) pause before you start?

Orienting

We do this naturally when there is a loud noise or something that surprises us. We turn towards the noise without even thinking about it. To disrupt our automatic response, we can choose to orient ourselves to our immediate environment. With eyes, head and neck moving together and slowly, softly scan whatever is around you. After you've intentionally noticed your surroundings, you can add noticing where you are grounded - feet on the ground, sitting bones in a chair etc. If breathwork is something you're open to, you can also add noticing where your breath shows up in your body.

Body Awareness

Our bodies pick up information from our environment that our minds may miss. Take a few minutes to scan your body and notice one area that feels pleasant, one that feels unpleasant and one that feels neutral. Regularly checking in with our bodies attunes us to its messages.

Have Your Own Back

A simple movement of stacking your vertebrae, one on top of the other, with your ears over your shoulders can create a solid frame that will allow you to relax the rest of your body. The movement may be very subtle but effective. Straighten up the back, soften down the front.

Peripheral/ Long Vision

Holding your fingers up to either side of your head so you can see them in your peripheral vision, allow your gaze to softly rest on something directly in front of you. This can be done outside as well when you can view longer distances and even a horizon.

My Hands

Take a few moments to look at your hands, noticing their shape, texture, temperature, colour and other features unique to your hands. When your attention wanders, gently bring it back to the details of your hands. When you are doing one of the many daily activities (dishes, food prep, showering, texting) that include your hands, pause and notice them with a “these are my hands” as a way to be fully in the present moment.

Vagal Massage

Gentle massaging your temples, many areas of your ears and neck stimulates the vagus nerve and can reset the nervous system. Focus on one area for a minimum of 30 seconds and longer as you wish.

Balancing and Juggling Acts

Sometimes simply balancing on one leg can bring your scattered attention or spinning thoughts to a single focus - trying to keep from falling over! Once this becomes too easy, you can make it more difficult by standing on something higher or closing your eyes. Tossing a ball or bean bag and catching it can also be a diversion from racing thoughts especially if you add doing it when looking away or with your eyes closed.

Body Scan

Systematically scan the body, one section at a time, and invite relaxation and softness to each part.

Activity Match Game

When you are feeling stressed and activated, engage in an activity that matches that feeling then gradually slow the activity. As you slow your activity gradually, your nervous system will respond by slowing down as well. For example, go for a run at first then slow to a walk and eventually stopping and resting.

Additional Resources

- Monthly Resiliency Newsletter & “Soothing Manoeuvres” videos at danettedams.com
- Irene Lyon’s work on Nervous System Regulation at irenelyon.com
- Sukie Baxter’s work on Vagal Massage for Stress Relief on YouTube
- Autism Coach @roryreckons on Twitter

