

Understanding Your Nervous System: A Guide to Anxiety + ADHD

Why Understanding Your Brain and Body Matters

When you live with anxiety or ADHD, it's easy to feel like your body is working against you-racing heart, tight chest, scattered thoughts, trouble focusing. These aren't personality flaws. They're biological responses driven by your nervous system. Understanding what's happening underneath the surface can help you develop more self-compassion-and eventually, more regulation.

The Central Nervous System: Your Body's Control Center

The central nervous system (CNS) is made up of your brain and spinal cord. It sends signals to every part of your body. Think of it as the main communication highway. It works with your autonomic nervous system to manage involuntary functions like breathing, heartbeat, and stress responses.

The Autonomic Nervous System: Balancing Stress and Calm

The autonomic nervous system has two main branches:

1. Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS): Triggers the fight/flight response. Increases heart rate, breathing, and muscle tension to help you respond to danger.
2. Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS): Helps your body rest, digest, and recover. Slows the heart rate, calms the mind, and promotes healing.

These two systems are always working to balance each other.

Anxiety and the Nervous System

Anxiety happens when your brain perceives a threat-whether real or imagined-and activates the sympathetic nervous system. This response is useful for survival, but in modern life, it can be triggered by stress, uncertainty, or overstimulation. For people with chronic anxiety or ADHD, the 'alarm system' in the brain (especially the amygdala) becomes more sensitive over time, leading to a state of ongoing alertness.

The Role of the Parasympathetic Nervous System

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The parasympathetic nervous system acts like a brake, helping your body slow down after stress. It lowers heart rate, increases digestion, and activates healing responses. When the parasympathetic system is engaged, you feel calmer, more grounded, and more capable of thinking clearly. However, for people with anxiety or ADHD, it can be harder for the body to return to this calm state without intentional support.

You're Not Broken-You're Wired for Survival

If it's hard for you to calm down, focus, or feel safe, there's a biological reason. Your body is doing what it was designed to do: protect you. Our goal in therapy is to help your nervous system learn how to feel safe more often-so you can spend less time in survival mode and more time feeling like yourself.