
Nervous System Information Sheet

Your body has a built-in stress response system, and understanding how it works is the first step toward managing it. The autonomic nervous system has two parts: one that prepares you for stress and one that calms you down.

The Sympathetic Nervous System

This system is your body's alarm and emergency response. Its job is to prepare you for action when you perceive a threat. It activates the "fight, flight, or freeze" response.

- **The "On-Edge" Mode (Fight):** You feel irritable, impatient, or have a short temper. You might feel the need to argue, confront others, or push back against what's happening.
- **The "Escape" Mode (Flight):** You feel an overwhelming need to get away from a situation. This might manifest as avoiding people, procrastinating on tasks, or wanting to quit a job or relationship.
- **The "Stuck" Mode (Freeze):** You feel paralysed, unable to make a decision or take action. You might feel mentally foggy, disconnected, or completely overwhelmed to the point of inaction.

Burnout is the result of this system being overused. When you're under chronic, unmanaged stress, your body remains in a constant state of low-grade fight-or-flight, eventually leading to physical and mental exhaustion. (*see burnout info sheet*)

The Parasympathetic Nervous System

This system is your body's rest and digest state. Its job is to calm you down and bring your body back to a state of balance once a threat has passed. When this system is active, your heart rate slows down, your breathing returns to a normal rhythm, and your muscles relax. The key to healing from burnout is to intentionally activate this system.

Here are some simple, effective ways to do it:

- **Mindful Breathing:** This is one of the quickest ways to activate your parasympathetic system. Try the 4-7-8 breathing technique: inhale quietly through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, and exhale completely through your mouth for 8 seconds.
- **Gentle Movement:** Engaging in low-impact activities like walking in nature, stretching, or yoga can calm your nervous system without the intensity of a high-stress workout.
- **Grounding and Sensory Experiences:** Engage your senses in a calming way. This can be as simple as drinking a warm cup of herbal tea, listening to soothing music, or taking a warm bath or shower.
- **Mindfulness:** Taking a few minutes to focus on your breath or a single sensation can help quiet the mind and reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed.