

CLEARBRIDGE

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NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION:

Your Sensory Toolkit

Your nervous system naturally moves between **three main states**:

- **Ventral Vagal (Safe & Connected)**: calm, present, engaged
- **Sympathetic (Fight or Flight)**: activated, anxious, keyed-up
- **Dorsal Vagal (Freeze or Shutdown)**: numb, low energy, disconnected

The goal is **not** to stay in the ventral state all the time—that isn't realistic.

The goal is to **notice when you have left it** and to have tools that help guide your system back.

Below are **sensory-based techniques** you can use to support your nervous system, depending on whether you feel **too activated** or **not activated enough**.

HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE IN

HYPERACTIVATION (Fight / Flight – Sympathetic State)

You may notice:

- Racing heart, shallow or rapid breathing
- Muscle tension, clenched jaw, shaky hands
- Feeling wired, restless, on edge, or irritable
- Racing thoughts or difficulty focusing
- Feeling overwhelmed, flooded with emotion, or urgent without knowing why
- Snapping at others or difficulty sleeping

Your body feels like the accelerator is stuck “on.”

5 WAYS TO DOWNREGULATE

From Hyperactivation → Ventral (One per Sense)

1. TOUCH: Slow self-havening or bilateral tapping

What to do:

Cross your arms over your chest and slowly tap left-right at a steady rhythm while breathing deeply. Or, gently stroke your arms from shoulders to elbows in a slow, even motion.

Why it works:

Rhythmic bilateral touch activates deep-pressure and proprioceptive pathways that signal safety to the brain, helping calm the alarm response.

2. HEARING: Humming or vocal toning

What to do:

Hum at a low, comfortable pitch for 1–2 minutes, or use sounds like “voo” or “om.” Notice the vibration in your chest and throat.

Why it works:

Vocal vibration mechanically stimulates the vagus nerve and increases parasympathetic activity.

3. SIGHT: Soft gaze or palming

What to do:

Rub your hands together, then gently place them over closed eyes for about 60 seconds. Or soften your gaze and look at something far away without focusing.

Why it works:

Reducing visual input and using peripheral vision helps calm the nervous system.

4. SMELL: Calming, familiar scents

What to do:

Slowly inhale lavender, chamomile, vanilla, or a familiar comforting scent.

Why it works:

Smell has a direct pathway to emotional regulation centers and can quickly signal safety.

5. TASTE: Slow, mindful soothing

What to do:

Sip warm tea or slowly let a piece of chocolate melt on your tongue.

Why it works:

Slow gustatory focus redirects attention and supports calming vagal pathways.

HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE IN

HYPOACTIVATION (Freeze / Shutdown – Dorsal Vagal State)

You may notice:

- Numbness, fogginess, or feeling “checked out”
- Heavy limbs, deep exhaustion
- Difficulty thinking, initiating tasks, or feeling emotions
- Disconnection from self or others
- A “who cares” or hopeless feeling

Your body feels like the brake is stuck “on.”

5 WAYS TO UPREGULATE

From Hypoactivation → Ventral (One per Sense)

1. TOUCH: Cold water to the face

What to do:

Splash cold water on your face or hold a cold cloth to your cheeks for 15–30 seconds.

Why it works:

Cold facial stimulation activates reflexes that help re-engage the nervous system.

2. HEARING: Upbeat rhythmic music

What to do:

Play music with a strong beat and let your body move even slightly.
Sing along if you can.

Why it works:

Rhythm and voice activate the social engagement system and gently mobilize energy.

3. SIGHT: Orienting and naming

What to do:

Slowly look around and name objects or colors out loud, or watch movement outside.

Why it works:

Orienting re-engages attention and brings the system back into the present moment.

4. SMELL: Stimulating scents

What to do:

Smell peppermint, citrus, eucalyptus, or rosemary with strong intentional inhales.

Why it works:

Sharp scents increase alertness and interrupt shutdown patterns.

5. TASTE: Sour, spicy, or crunchy

What to do:

Try lemon, ginger, sour candy, crunchy fruit, or ice chips.

Why it works:

Intense oral sensations provide a safe “wake-up” signal to the nervous system.

Final Reminder

Nervous system regulation is about **responding**, not perfection.
Awareness + small sensory shifts can create meaningful change.